

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
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January/February 2011

FFRF blasts Army 'spiritual fitness' survey

In a Dec. 29 complaint to Secretary of the Army John McHugh, the Freedom From Religion Foundation said the U.S. Army has no business subjecting military troops to a mandatory "spiritual fitness" assessment. FFRF, which has many members who are "foxhole atheists," asked the Army to immediately stop the evaluation that's part of a program called Comprehensive Soldier Fitness.

"It is ironic that while nonbelievers are fighting to protect freedoms for all Americans, their freedoms are being trampled upon by this Army practice," wrote Foundation Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

The letter noted that while about 15% of the U.S. population is not religious, surveys have shown that close to one-fourth of all military personnel identify as atheist, agnostic or have no religious preference.

Nonbelieving soldiers who took the survey told FFRF that when they answered the spiritual questions on the survey negatively, they were referred to a "spiritual fitness training program." Soldiers are evaluated by how they rank statements on a spectrum from "not like me at all" to "very much like me." The spiritual statements include:

"I am a spiritual person."

"My life has a lasting meaning."

"I believe there is a purpose for my life."
"I often find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs."

"In difficult times, I pray or meditate."

"I attended religious services [how often the last month]."

Barker and Gaylor called the negative assessment for nonspiritual soldiers deeply offensive and inappropriate. "By definition, nontheists do not believe in deities, spirits or the supernatural. The Army may not send the morale-deflating message to nonbelievers that they are lesser soldiers, much less imply they are somehow incomplete, purposeless or empty. As nontheists, we reject the idea that there is a purpose for life; we believe individuals make their own purpose in life."

Those who receive low "spiritual fitness" ratings are referred to a training program in which they are told, absurdly, that "Prayer is for all individuals." They are encouraged to use "spiritual support as your armor or battle gear" and seek out chaplain guidance, and to consider "church" and "higher power."

"We are shocked that the training module resurrects a bogus Christian revisionist explanation for ceremonial flag folding, one which has been explicitly repudiated by the Department of Veteran Affairs," noted Barker.

FFRF cited Supreme Court case law mandating government neutrality and protecting freedom of conscience. The spiritual fitness evaluation, FFRF noted, is also in violation of Army equal opportunity provisions.

"Service members have the constitutional right to decide whether to observe religious practices and what beliefs or nonbeliefs to profess, accept or reject about life, meaning, spirits, etc. Neither CSF nor the Army may dictate what is orthodox in matters of conscience," the letter concluded.

After FFRF and other groups complained, Sgt. Justin Griffith, who is stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., went public with his negative evaluation. Others



In the belly of the beast

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor's December visit to Tulsa, Okla., included a stop at Oral Roberts University. The six-story, 30-ton bronze sculpture named "The Healing Hands" was cast in 1980 in Juarez, Mexico, and then installed at the evangelist's City of Faith Medical and Research Center (one hand represents prayer, the other medicine). When the hospital went broke in 1989, the statue was moved to its current home at ORU.

ORU founder, faith healer and televangelist Oral Roberts was notorious for his fundraising ploy when he announced in 1987 that God would "call me home" unless he raised \$8 million. ("God" finally called him home in 2009.)

From left are Marilyn Clarke, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Ron McDaniel, Bill Dusenberry and Tulsa chapter President Randy Bradley. Activist Dan Nerren took the photo. Dan designed the banner to protest city government observances of the National Day of Prayer. Annie Laurie met members of FFRF's new Tulsa chapter and also addressed a meeting of the Humanist Association of Tulsa. She thanks all her Tulsa hosts.

have also spoken out, but Griffith, 27, co-founder of Military Atheists & Secular Humanists, has been very vocal. His low spiritual fitness score indicated he faced "some significant challenges. . . . You may click here at any time to connect with a counselor who is ready to assist you with a problem that requires immediate attention. . . . Improving your spiritual fitness should be an important goal."

"I refuse to take this kind of insult any longer," Griffith said on the Rock Beyond Belief website. "Not only am I an active duty U.S. Army soldier, I'm also an atheist. I'm equally proud of both descriptions, and I'm honored to be one of the thousands of foxhole atheists who have fought or are currently fighting for our country and our Constitution."

Rock Beyond Belief is planning a

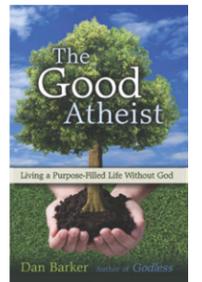
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The Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness is a \$125 million "holistic fitness program" unveiled in 2009.

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What's new with FFRF Honorary Board? *Page 5*

Dan Barker's newest book



Page 9



Linda Greenhouse looks at the Supreme Court *Pages 10-12*

Photo: Brent Ncastro

Meet a Member

Peach of a freethinker

Name: Perry Mitchell.

Where I live: Atlanta, near Emory University.

Where and when I was born: Atlanta, 1943.

Family: My wonderful, smart wife, Pam (an agnostic); grown daughter, Susan (an atheist, I'm proud to say); liberal 98-year-old mom; larger-than-life older sister (unfortunately an atheist; see "These are not" below).

Education: Duke University, B.A. in English, 1965; University of Iowa, M.A. in literature, 1967.

Occupation: Retired from a 40-year career in advertising as a writer, creative director and ad agency partner. I'm now a full-time househusband and volunteer.

Military service: I was drafted during the Vietnam War and served overseas in Panmunjom, Korea, in 1969-70.

How I got where I am today: Good education, luck, reading constantly, working hard and smart, really thinking about what's important in the world and in my life, not living above my means, trying to make the best of every situation (no matter how bad), being free from the irrationalities and archaic superstitions of religion.

Where I'm headed: More volunteering and financial support for causes I believe in, especially adult literacy, public radio and FFRF. I'm looking forward to Pam joining me in retirement so we can spend even more time traveling, helping others and enjoying life.

Person in history I admire and why: Bob Dylan, the greatest artist of the 20th century, in my opinion. His complex but honestly expressed worldview, as well as his ability to capture and speak to deep emotions, have resonated with me for nearly 50 years.

A quotation I like: I have this framed in my home office and try to live by it: "Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom." (Theodore Rubin, psychiatrist and writer, born in 1923). I got the quote from a great, free Internet service, A Word A Day at wordsmith.org/awad/index.html.

These are a few of my favorite things: Honesty, fairness, kindness, family, rock music and big band music, my iPod during exercise walks, movies, novels, traveling (just got back from the Amazon), yard work, dark chocolate, 1950s cars, competitive badminton,



Perry Mitchell returned in 2008 to Panmunjom on the border between South and North Korea, where he served in the U.S. Army in the late 1960s. The figure represents a friendly military policeman at the entrance to a museum just outside the DMZ, which is now the most popular tourist destination in Korea.

ton, volunteering, and FFRF's smart, positive and personal "Out of the Closet" billboard campaign!

These are not: Pretentious people, overly fancy restaurants, technology that quits working unexpectedly, snarling dogs, Rush Limbaugh, our idiotic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, religions that put women down and atheists (look it up on Wikipedia).

My doubts about religion started: During the civil rights movement, when I was a teenager. At my family's Methodist church in Atlanta, they put ushers outside on the steps to stop African-Americans from entering. I said to myself, "What kind of church that says it follows Christ would do that? What kind of god would allow it?" My rational thinking just took off from that point.

Why I'm a freethinker: Because I continue to "think freely," no religion can begin to pass any kind of rationality test. I can't believe in anything I know is clearly untrue, i.e., virgin birth, rising from the dead, an all-powerful god who would let his world get as screwed up as ours often is. I can't be honest with myself and live as anything but an atheist.

Ways I promote freethought: I proudly wear my "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist" and "Imagine No Religion" T-shirts. I gladly explain my beliefs and their political implications (e.g., gay rights, freedom of choice, stem cell research, aid-in-dying), to anyone who wants to have that discussion. I'm a local media contact for FFRF. When the "famous quotes" billboard campaign ran in Atlanta last summer, I was interviewed for a newspaper article and appeared three times on the local news. It was fun and helpful, I hope.



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State / Church Quotes

In this country, anyone can pray any time they want. Deeply, fervently — and silently. Having a representative of government invoking God is insensitive, intimidating and at odds with the Constitution. The council should keep its prayers to itself.

Editorial supporting judge's ruling against sectarian prayer by Point Pleasant Beach [N.J.] Borough Council members

Asbury Park Press, 12-20-10

I think he has put a face on the contemporary reality that many Americans do not have a religious affiliation. For any cause to advance and for any voice to be heard, someone needs to be the face of that movement and give voice to those concerns. In that sense, Michael Newdow has been very successful.

Charles Haynes, director, Religious Freedom Education Project

Christian Century, 12-21-10

In Connecticut, there's a feeling that's much too prevalent that if all religions are covered, then everyone's covered. And that's not true.

Dennis Paul Himes, Connecticut Valley Atheists, protesting the City Council's Christian prayer by staying seated

Hartford Advocate, 12-15-10

Making a visible statement, [House Speaker] Boehner invited a slew of school choice backers to the State of the Union address, packing the speaker's box with students, parents and teachers tied to Washington's Catholic schools. On the guest list was Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington, along with advocates of the voucher program and students who attend D.C.'s Catholic schools with the help of scholarship money.

Fox News, 1-26-11

A Note to Subscribers

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January/February 2011

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Pastor in chief addresses prayer breakfast

President Barack Obama, like many presidents before him since 1953, delivered an address at this year's National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 3, attended by about 3,000 high-ranking political and religious leaders. The president's speech included biblical passages and discussed his prayers and the path to "finding his Christian faith."

The National Prayer Breakfast is organized by The Fellowship Foundation, also known as "The Family," a secretive fundamentalist Christian group dragged into the spotlight by Jeff Sharlet in his books *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* and *C Street: The Fundamentalist Threat to American Democracy*. According to the Baptist Joint Committee, the Family seeks "to use the halls of government to promote Christianity around the world."

The New York Times points out that the Family has been accused of having ties to Uganda legislation calling for the imprisonment and execution of homosexuals.

The president said of the evangelical Christian National Prayer Breakfast: "It's a tradition that I am proud to uphold, not only as a fellow believer but as an elected leader."

It was through Obama's early "experience working with pastors and

laypeople trying to heal the wounds of hurting neighborhoods, that I came to know Jesus Christ for myself, and embrace him as my lord and savior," he told the audience. The word "Jesus" not surprisingly garnered applause.

"Tom Coburn is here," Obama said of the Republican senator and former Southern Baptist deacon from Oklahoma. "He is not only a dear friend but also a brother in Christ. We came into the Senate at the same time. Even though we are on opposite sides of a whole bunch of issues, part of what has bound us together is a shared faith, a recognition that we pray to and serve the same God."

Does the president not also feel bound to those who do not believe in his god?

More from his speech:

- "And let me tell you, these past two years, they have deepened my faith. The presidency has a funny way of making a person feel the need to pray. Abe Lincoln said, as many of you know, 'I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had no place else to go.'"

- "Fortunately, I'm not alone in my prayers. Pastor friends like Joel Hunter and T.D. Jakes come over to the Oval Office every once in a while to pray with me and pray for the nation. The

chapel at Camp David has provided consistent respite and fellowship. The director of our Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnership's office, Joshua DuBois — a young minister himself — he starts my morning off with meditations from scripture."

- "And through that office, we're expanding the way faith groups can partner with our government. We're helping them feed more kids who otherwise would go hungry. We're helping fatherhood groups get dads the support they need to be there for their children. We're working with nonprofits to improve the lives of people around the world. And we're doing it in ways that are aligned with our constitutional principles. And in this work, we intend to expand it in the days ahead, rooted in the notions of partnership and justice and the imperatives to help the poor."

- "As I travel across the country folks often ask me what is it that I pray for. And like most of you, my prayers sometimes are general: Lord, give me the strength to meet the challenges of my office. Sometimes they're specific: Lord, give me patience as I watch Malia go to her first dance (laughter), where there will be boys. Lord, have that skirt get longer as she travels to that dance (laughter)."



Official White House photo by Pete Souza

Please contact the president via the White House comment line (202-456-1111) or Web contact form (whitehouse.gov/contact/) or by mail (below) to object to his inappropriate participation in the National Prayer Breakfast.

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

— By Bonnie Gutsch and Bill Dunn

FFRF blasts Army 'spiritual fitness' survey

Continued from front page

free festival on an undetermined date in March or April at Fort Bragg that will feature secular musicians and speakers. It's meant to counter the Rock the Fort Christian music festival the post hosted in conjunction with the Billy Graham ministry last fall. (See the page 6 story on FFRF's continuing complaint to Fort Bragg for its co-sponsorship of a pervasively sectarian and proselytizing event.)

Corrections

Dan Barker's arms were not "akimbo" in Mexico City in a page 23 photo in the December issue (nor was he doing the limbo). Akimbo means hands on hips.

The December page 1 headline "Reason (n.) to think coherently, logically" was not immaculately conceived. The (n.) should have been (v.).

Clarification

The quote ("I'm not convinced that faith can move mountains, but I've seen what it can do to skyscrapers.") in Andrew Cederdahl's December "Meet a Member" should have been attributed to William H. Gascoyne.

It was part of a 2004 letter to the editor by Gascoyne, an ASIC (Application-Specific Integrated Circuit) design engineer from San Jose, Calif. He explained the quote on his blog in 2009:

"A few years ago, the San Jose Mercury News was running a 'one-liners' section as part of their editorial letters. I had been saying since 9/11 that what had brought down the towers was faith (given the motivation of the perpetrators), and it occurred to me to juxtapose that notion with the idea of faith moving mountains. I'm surprised that no one seems to have beaten me to it."

His interesting piece titled "Skyscrapers and Faith" is here:

billgascoyne.wordpress.com/2009/07/11/skyscrapers-and-faith-off-topic/

Welcome 43 new Lifers, 1 After-Lifer!

A whopping 43 individuals became Lifetime Members since the last issue of Freethought Today. FFRF is also delighted to announce one new "After-Life" Member: James O. Stepp.

New Lifetime Members, not including one individual who preferred not to be named, are:

Philip and Marjorie Appleman, W.D. Arnold, Frank Barker, Charles Bender, Tom Cara, Richard Dewey, Michael Dillon, Jayne Edwards, Steve Ellis, Winfred S. Emmons III, Charles Gadd,

Mutya Gener, Dale Higgs, Marcia Hischer, Linda Hollingsworth, Chuck Hutchings, Jake Jaramillo, Val Johnson, Eugene John Kettner, Fred Kusko, Katharine Leavitt, Lydia Lukahnovich, Christopher Madden (gift from Kirstin Madden), Mal Prinzing, Lachlan Pope, Zenaido Quintana, Douglas Reilly, Dr. Lowell Saferstein, Shaikh Sarmad, Dean and Dorea Schramm, Fred Schreiber, Kelly Smith, William R. Stewart, Amy Tan, L. Kristofer Thomsen, Catherine Trejbal, Mark Virdin, Barbara G. Walker, Jessica Walker and Howard Wilson.

Generous Lifetime Member Harold Saferstein, M.D., gifted Lifetime Memberships to Zenaido Quintana, Richard Dewey and Dr. Lowell Saferstein. Phil and Margie Appleman, who recently designated \$1,000 each for Lifetime Membership, are now Lifetime Mem-

bers several times over!

States represented:

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. Also represented are the Philippines and Virgin Islands.

After-Life Memberships are \$5,000, for those who want their gift to "live after them." Lifetime Memberships of \$1,000 per individual designated for membership or renewal also ensure never another renewal notice, go into a safe "rainy day" endowment, and are deductible for income-tax purposes, as are all gifts and FFRF dues.

Thank you to FFRF's 43 newest Lifetime Members and its newest After-Life Member!

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA.

It's easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

FFRF
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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

What Is a Freethinker?



free-think-er n. A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

The Foundation's e-mail address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, "action alerts" and "Freethought of the Day" should contact info@ffrf.org.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Saturday / Sunday Serendipitous Sonnet

The TV is glowing with emerald elephants,
Kooky young camels and cool kangaroos,
But Saturday's star is a snazzy red snake
Who can rap and palaver and chatter and schmooze –
And whenever the kiddies hear Peter the Python
Give sermons on cussing and other taboos,
They listen a minute (or maybe a half),
Then they laugh and they giggle, and giggle and
laugh.

Mommy and Daddy, one gray Sunday morning,
Dressed up in gray jacket, gray dress, and gray socks,
And they went off to church, where a gray-bearded
preacher
Was huckstering Adam and Eve to his flock:
When he told them a snake said real words as it
wriggled,
It's hard to believe it, but – nobody giggled!

© 2011 Philip Appleman

Freethought Today is honored to publish this new "sonnet."



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His eight published volumes of poetry include *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the

National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both Lifetime Members (five times over) of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," Philip's comic masterpiece, for the Foundation's newest musical CD, "Beware of Dogma," featuring Dan Barker. That CD also includes Phil's poem "Fleas," set to the music of "Trees." *New and Selected Poems* is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd. *The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, is \$22 ppd, *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*, \$27 and *Darwin's Ark*, \$23 (ffrf.org/shop/).



Overheard

I'm saying God doesn't exist. I'm not saying faith doesn't exist. I know faith exists. I see it all the time. But believing in something doesn't make it true. Hoping that something is true doesn't make it true. The existence of God is not subjective. He either exists or he doesn't. It's not a matter of opinion. You can have your own opinions. But you can't have your own facts.
Writer-comedian Ricky Gervais, "Why I'm an atheist"
Wall Street Journal, 12-19-10



It's a separation of church and state issue.

Steve Silverberg, village trustee in Piermont, N.Y., on the board's refusal to waive a \$300 rental fee for St. John's Catholic Church to use a city building Nyack-Piermont Patch, 1-17-11

Report: Majority of money donated at church doesn't make it to God
Satirical story headline
The Onion, 1-13-11

If you say pedophile priests and abuse are the work of the devil, you take responsibility off of the perpetrators and those who protected them.

Thomas Groome, Boston College theologian, on the pope blaming demonic causes for the clergy sex abuse scandal
Baltimore Sun, 1-12-11

There is no doubt in my mind that [Pope John Paul II] was a disgraceful manager of the Church with respect to the greatest crisis it has faced in generations. His relationship with and protection of the pedophile, incestuous neo-fascist, Marcial Maciel, alone makes beatification, to my mind, an appalling swipe at the children John Paul II abandoned to the wolves.
Columnist Andrew Sullivan
The Atlantic, 1-20-11

[L]ess than one abuser out of six was inflicted the maximum penalty available to the bishop: definitive suspension. And even fewer, 16%, were effectively condemned by the judiciary.

Summary by Le Soir newspaper of the disposition of reported Catholic clergy sex abuse cases in Belgium
Agence France-Presse, 1-12-11

The boy described the defendant asking him before the alleged abuse, "Do you want some?" and when he replied in the negative, the defendant would say "For God's sake, just say yes."
Prosecutor Tariq Shakor Khan, at the

trial of Muslim worship leader Mohammed Hanif Khan for raping a 12-year-old in a mosque
The [U.K.] Independent, 1-12-11

Pastor Uses Illusions to Share Christmas Message

Headline on story about Rev. Lawrence Khong and his daughter Priscilla's magic show before 7,000 Baptists in Singapore
Christian Post, 12-21-10

Perv Priest Slaps Probe
Headline on story about Msgr. Charles Kavanagh being defrocked for sexually abusing a Catholic student in the 1970s
New York Post, 12-19-10

Intelligent design will probably not pass constitutional muster, but the movement always adapts to the court cases and calls it something else.

Michael Berkman, co-author of Evolution, Creationism and the Battle to Control America's Classrooms, on the fifth anniversary of the ruling in Kitzmiller v. Dover
Philadelphia Inquirer, 12-20-10

Dover was a life-changing event in terms of allowing me to have a voice about judicial independence. The troubling aspect is that I've recognized we have a need to have better civics education.

U.S. District Judge John Jones III, who got death threats after ruling against teaching intelligent design in public schools
Philadelphia Inquirer, 12-20-10

His point of view is that his Inaugural Day needs to respect the separation of church and state. Separation of church and state is an important constitutional principle.

Michael Trainor, spokesman for Rhode Island Governor-elect Lincoln Chafee, who said he'd skip Episcopal services Jan. 4 to be at home with his family
Providence Journal, 12-20-10

The writ of the Founding Fathers has upheld the ability of Americans to worship and practice religion as they choose, including the right to believe in no religion at all.

However, these liberties are not self-sustaining, and require a stalwart commitment by each generation to preserve and apply them.

President Obama, proclaiming Jan. 14 as Religious Freedom Day
whitehouse.gov, 1-14-11



YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Broadcasts and streams Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, Progressive Talk The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.

Listen: iTunes or podcasts archived at: ffrf.org/news/radio

**Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews**

FFRF Honorary Board members eye 2011

FFRF's Honorary Board is made up of 14 distinguished achievers who have made known their dissent from religion. The Foundation asked board members to update *Freethought Today* on what they're up to and to make a prediction for 2011. (We correctly predicted that some would be too busy to be able to respond or to make a prediction.)

Daniel Dennett:

Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse Engineer the Mind, will appear from MIT Press in March, authored by Matthew Hurley, Reg Adams and me. It grew out of Matthew's thesis under my direction. It has more than a hundred good jokes in it (but we have to dissect them to demonstrate our evolutionary/computational theory in action).

I will be a visiting professor at American University of Beirut in March, April and May, teaching a seminar on evolutionary theory, using *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* and more recent writings on evolution.

I continue to spend summers at our farm in Blue Hill, Maine, but we're not farming seriously any more. I prefer to spend my time sailing Xanthippe, my old Beneteau First-42 (in the ocean), and Gibbifer, my new Hobie Wave catamaran (on Toddy Pond).

In 2011 I predict that I will finish a book about thinking tools, which should appear in 2012.

Edward Sorel:

My illustrations and pictorial essays appear in *Vanity Fair* several times a year. The same is true of *The New Yorker*, for which I occasionally do covers. I'm at work on a graphic novel.

In October 2011, the School of Visual Arts will mount a retrospective exhibit of my work.

Visitors to New York can see my murals at The Waverly Inn and The Monkey Bar. I am married, have four children and six grandchildren.

I predict more and more churches will close due to lack of attendance, and *Time* magazine will run a cover story about "The New Religious Revival."

Steven Pinker:

The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined will be published by Viking in September. It contains many reasons why religion should play no part in the governing of a state. I have been fortunate to accompany my wife, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, on her book tours for *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*, the great secularist novel of our time.

In 2011, I predict that most predictions about what will happen in 2011 will be falsified.

Susan Jacoby:

My new book, *Never Say Die: The Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age*, will be published by Pantheon in February. I would describe it as a reason-based and evidence-based look at old age, in contrast to the "age is just a number" propaganda that surrounds us all. If I'm going to be anywhere near Madison on my book tour, I'll let you know.

I'm scared to predict what might happen in 2011 — almost anything, given that our government will be even more polarized than in the last two years. This is going to be a bad year for anyone who believes in the separation of church and state, that I do predict.

Ron Reagan:

The big news in Ron Reagan's world was the January release of *My Father at 100*, his memoir about being the son of the 40th U.S. president, who would have turned 100 on Feb. 6 had he not died in 2004.

Most of the news initially surrounding the book centered on the author writing that he deduces, given what is known now about Alzheimer's, "It is likely that the disease was present when he was president."

On the Jan. 19 "Colbert Report," the host asked Reagan, "How can you live in the house of God and grow up to be an atheist?"

Reagan answered, "It was probably the incubus perched on the edge of my cribs that breathed liberalism and atheism into me."

Stephen Colbert also asked, "What are the things that I should forget about your father so that I can keep the image in my head the way I want?"

Reagan answered, "Probably, raising taxes, amnesty for illegal immigrants and, well, one of the most liberal abortion laws in California when he was governor."

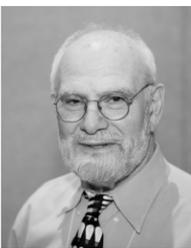
Oliver Sacks, M.D.:

Dr. Sacks' 10th book, *The Mind's Eye* (Knopf, 2010), tells the stories of people who are able to navigate the world and communicate despite losing the power of speech, the capacity to recognize faces, the sense of three-dimensional space, the ability to read and the loss of sight.

He continues to write for *The New Yorker* and other publications, as you'll see on page 12 of this issue with his fine piece on the late David Randolph.

The documentary "The Music Never Stopped" at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival was based on Sacks' story "The Last Hippie," which was one of seven told in his 1995 book *An Anthropologist on Mars*.

The eminent neurologist recently told the magazine *PopMatters* that he's working on "my backstroke and a book



Michael Newdow:

What's new with me? It's nice that you ask
Although I'm not certain I'm up to the task
To fill in the blanks that exist in my life
The songs that I've sung. The joy and the strife

Start in the courts, where my hat had been tossed
My record was awesome: lost, lost and lost
But "Onward!" say I, as we fight for what's pure
(Oh, yeah. I forgot. I, in fact, lost one more.)

My daughter got older. She boogies and jives.
And with her straight A's, she now also drives
Because of a promise that worked well to bind her
To get those great grades: a Nissan Pathfinder

A car upon which I would certainly pass
(It goes twenty feet on a gallon of gas)
But still there is ecstasy there in her voice
And she earned the right to have made her own choice

I traveled to Fiji the end of last year
And I'm glad to say there's another trip near
In three weeks or so (in my cruise MD role)
I'll be kind of close to the southernmost pole

Antarctica is where I'll be for ten days
Midnight sun, there where a penguin mom lays
One or two eggs in a rookery patch
Cold as can be, and yet those eggs hatch

Soon I'll be back after leaving that scene
No doubt then pining for flora that's green
Yet surely missing the icy cold reefs
As I return to the writing of briefs

Fighting for rights that are equal for all
Patching the holes in Tom Jefferson's wall
And a new battle, in a new cause
Doing away with the custody laws

Maybe that, too, is a quest that I'll lose
Maybe some more judges will just refuse
To do their jobs as they swore that they would
Fearing the ground where the honest have stood

Surely they know what is wrong and what's right
Surely to fairness they seek to bring light
And (so that duty they won't opt to shirk)
I'll now end this poem, and get back to work!

In 2011, I predict that God will make, in that one year, the same number of appearances as he's made over the past 13.8 billion years.



Photo: Brent Nicastro

about nonpsychotic hallucinations."

Robert Sapolsky:

Robert Sapolsky, a Stanford University professor and neuroendocrinologist, once suggested that FFRF put up a sign at its conventions to say, "Welcome, hellbound atheists."

The welcome mat is always out for

Sapolsky as a lecturer and writer, at home and abroad. For example, on Jan. 11 his talk to the University of Florida Honors Program was titled "Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: Stress, Disease, and Coping" (also the title of one of his books).

He continues his work as a research associate at the Institute of Primate Research, National Museums of Kenya. His recent *New York Times* essay, "This Is Your Brain on Metaphors," drew more than 200 comments from readers online.



It Pays to Complain

Prayer at lunch a bunch of bunk

Washington FFRF member Tom Hayes relates his freethought accomplishment:

"In 2003, I moved to Tacoma from Des Moines, Iowa. I found that at the senior center here, one had to listen to a Christian prayer before lunch. Being aware that the meals are federally subsidized, I called the Department of Agriculture to complain. They referred me to the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging.

"I called the Seattle office, where an administrator heard me out and gave me the phone number of the San Francisco administrator. These two gentlemen got the department to issue a policy on prayer which prohibits staff or volunteers from leading prayer in western and northwestern states.

"I am an 84-year-old World War II Navy vet and Cold War submariner. How about an attaboy?"

[Editor's note: Attaboy, Tom! Keep up the good fight.]

FFRF letters, alerts protest mixing state, church

Foundation schools Tennessee 'supers'

The Foundation sent educational letters in January to 132 Tennessee school superintendents reminding them that official prayer at school-sponsored events is illegal and urging districts to adhere to the law.

FFRF receives numerous complaints about prayer at athletic events in public schools. At least 10 of these complaints since October 2010 originated in Tennessee.

"It is illegal for a public school to organize, sponsor or lead prayers at public high school athletic events," wrote Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "It is no defense that attendance at athletic events is voluntary. Courts have rejected arguments that voluntariness can protect a religious activity at a school function from the requirements of the First Amendment. Public school children cannot be forced to choose between their First Amendment rights and their right to participate in public school events."

She urged superintendents to protect the freedom of conscience of all district students, parents and visitors, by reviewing their current school practices.

[Thanks to legal intern Jane Kleven for her work on this project.]

FFRF letters protest legislative prayer

Wisconsin State Assembly: The Foundation has formally put leadership in the Wisconsin State Assembly on notice that its pervasively sectarian prayers are in violation of the law. FFRF objected to the "histrionic displays of politicized religiosity" in the Assembly Chambers, and countless sermons to state legislators to act to "glorify Jesus Christ."

Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor charged in her Jan. 26 letter to Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald: "The Wisconsin State Assembly's practice of opening its sessions with strongly sectarian Christian prayers/sermons is an egregious violation of the Establishment Clause. These prayers/sermons are delivered by the representatives or by clergy hand-selected and endorsed by the representatives to advance their own particular Christian denominations."

Attorney Sarah Braasch, who conducted an extensive study of the prayers for FFRF, found that 100% of representative-led prayers for the 2009-10 legislative session were Christian. All but one invoked the Christian deity, Jesus Christ, or some variant. The vast majority of clergy invited to lead prayers on behalf of representatives were also Christian and invoked Jesus. The prayers often cited biblical scripture.

FFRF also objected to the Assembly's unlawful prayers to previous Assembly speakers in 2008 and 2009. FFRF hand-

delivered its request to Fitzgerald, Speaker Pro Tempore Bill Kramer and Chief Clerk Patrick Fuller, along with extensive excerpts of the problematic prayers and a chart documenting the sectarian and overwhelmingly Christian emphasis. All members of the Assembly received a copy of the letter.

Iowa Legislature: FFRF, on behalf of its Iowa membership, has also urged the Iowa Legislature to drop prayer and reject resolutions continuing prayer in the 84th General Assembly and providing compensation to "chaplains" officiating over prayer. FFRF sent letters Jan. 7 to the president of the Senate, Jack Kibbie, to the speaker of the House of Representatives, Kraig Paulsen, as well as to other state officials and to each Senate and House member.

Local public boards: On the local level, FFRF sent a letter Jan. 13 to the El Paso County Commission in Colorado Springs, Colo., after Commissioner Peggy Littleton called for more prayer at her first meeting.

"I'd like to encourage my colleagues to have, at a minimum, prayer together every Tuesday and expand it to leaders, elected officials and citizens who would like to express their blessing over the board," Littleton said during the Jan. 11 meeting, according to the Colorado Springs Gazette.

"Because Littleton's appeal was not a policy item, informal agreement by at least three commissioners propelled it into motion," the Gazette reported. "And because the commission chair has authority over agendas, it's a done deal."

The commission's action, approved by new Chairwoman Amy Lathen, brought FFRF's letter on behalf of an El Paso County resident. Co-President Dan Barker noted that government prayer is "unnecessary, inappropriate and divisive. Calling upon commissioners and citizens to rise and pray (even silently) is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular county government," Barker said. "Commissioners are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way. They do not need to worship on taxpayers' time."

Prayer complaints were also sent in January to Marshfield, Wis.; Clarksville, Tenn.; Live Oak, Fla.; Connersville, Ind.; Broken Arrow, Okla.; Tulsa, Okla. (second letter); and Yakima, Wash. (second letter).

FFRF continues to rock Christian fort

FFRF sent a second letter Jan. 25 protesting U.S. Army involvement in the evangelical "Rock the Fort" festival to the commanding general at Fort Bragg, N.C. The letter objects to "pervasive abuses and inappropriate expenditures" related to Rock the Fort, uncovered by a Freedom of Information Act request to the Army made by the Foundation, received on Jan. 11.

The Foundation first objected last Sept. 21 to the Sept. 25 festival which



was sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association and Fort Bragg's Religious Support Office.

"While we do not feel we received a complete response to our FOIA request, a number of documents reveal a high degree of impermissible Army aid to Rock the Fort," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

Disclosed Army expenditures for Rock the Fort appeared to total \$52,475.80, but FFRF estimates the undisclosed personnel costs to be much higher.

A "Memoranda of Instruction" document shows that various departments at Fort Bragg were responsible for a majority of the tasks to organize and host "Rock the Fort." The fort event action officer alone was assigned 12 tasks, while the Billy Graham Evangelical Association was only responsible for four duties.

The "budget" document shows Army organizers apparently spent \$6,450 of public money on food. Hotel rooms for 39 "guests" cost taxpayers \$7,168, and "escort vans" for artists cost \$1,360. Apparently, one "worship service leader" was given a \$1,500 honorarium. Fort Bragg spent over \$12,000 on advertising. Thousands of dollars were apparently spent on Christian T-shirts, a climbing rock wall, children's activities and Graham ministry DVDs.

The Billy Graham Evangelical Association, with reported net assets in 2008 of \$171.5 million, is clearly not in need of taxpayer subsidy, charged Gaylor.

"It is a misuse of taxpayer money to aid any Christian ministry," said Gaylor. "But it shows grossly misplaced fiscal decision-making on the part of Fort Bragg to subsidize an event put on by a multimillion dollar evangelical ministry. What a boondoggle!"

A freethinking soldier is organizing a "Rock Beyond Belief" festival, planned for April, to counter Rock the Fort and to test whether the Army will lend its support to a festival celebrating nonbelief. Speakers tentatively include Richard Dawkins and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, among others.

In response to FFRF's initial letter, Fort Bragg Commanding Lt. Gen. Frank Helmick wrote that he is "willing to provide similar support to comparable events sponsored by similar non-Federal entities that address the needs of the Soldiers on this Installation."

Gaylor's Jan. 25 response: "Our preference is for Fort Bragg to refrain from hosting any religious (or nonreligious) events of this nature, as beyond the constitutional limitations and purview of the Army. However, given your earlier response and the Army's repeated sectarian advancement of evangelical Christianity, it would appear incumbent that Fort Bragg must now offer the equivalent support and assistance

to an alternative nonreligious event."

FFRF has filed an FOIA appeal for more records and clarification of where all the money came from.

Virginia district bows to pressure

The Giles County School Board in Pearisburg, Va., voted 5-0 on Jan. 20 to reinstall the Ten Commandments next to the U.S. Constitution in displays in the district's six buildings. The administration had removed the religious text from the 4-foot-tall displays in December on advice of legal counsel after getting an FFRF complaint on behalf of a local resident.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote a Dec. 8 letter to Superintendent Terry Arbogast. Elliott cited *Stone v. Graham* (SCOTUS 1980). Arbogast replied Dec. 17 that the district would remove the Commandments and replace them with "another historical document" during the Christmas break. That didn't sit well with district patrons, who convinced the board to reverse the removal.

According to the Roanoke Times, Baptist Pastor Shahn Wilburn was instrumental in getting the biblical displays mounted after the 1999 Columbine High School shootings in Colorado.

"It is so disheartening to see public officials in Virginia — the state that produced Madison and Jefferson — directly flout the law and violate the constitutionally required separation between religion and government," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The preeminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature."

Gaylor invited parents with children in Giles County Public Schools who might consider serving as plaintiffs to contact FFRF at 608-256-8900 or info@ffrf.org. Identities of plaintiffs can be protected.

"I commend Superintendent Arbogast for respecting the law and the rights of conscience of schoolchildren. Shame on the Giles County School Board for flouting clear Supreme Court precedent! A school board should not be teaching disrespect for the Constitution. Religious dogma and doctrine do not belong on schoolhouse walls," Gaylor said.

Texas choir director yearns for Jesus

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott objected by letter Jan. 14 on behalf of a Texas complainant to a choir director leading students in prayer at Tascosa High School in the Amarillo School District.

"Our complainant informs us that

Mr. Talley is known to have in-class prayers. It is our information and understanding that each Friday, Mr. Talley's students sing 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You.' We are told that it is often sung with students holding hands and heads bowed. We also understand that prior to competitions, Mr. Talley asks the students to bow their heads and then leads them in prayer."

The director is also alleged to have held a Sunday worship service at a Holiday Inn in Dallas for students who attended a choir competition last March.

Alabama gov 'friends' Christians only

The Foundation objected by letter after newly sworn Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley told a Baptist congregation Jan. 17: "Anybody here today who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior, I'm telling you, you're not my brother and you're not my sister, and I want to be your brother."

"These comments are divisive and exclude non-Christians and nonbelievers from their own government and communities," wrote Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Governor Bentley is the top executive of Alabama, not the top preacher. He governs by the authority — not of Jesus — but of our entirely secular and godless Constitution."

Members were asked to contact Bentley, who later apologized after receiving a storm of negative publicity. His "if-based" apology was classic: "If anyone from other religions felt disenfranchised by the language, I want to say I am sorry. I am sorry if I offended anyone in any way."

If, on the other hand, you weren't offended, he said nothing wrong.

Solstice sign went up in Mississippi

At this season of
THE WINTER SOLSTICE
may reason prevail.

There are no gods,
no devils, no angels,
no heaven or hell.

There is only
our natural world.
Religion is but
myth and superstition
that hardens hearts
and enslaves minds.

Freedom From Religion Foundation

FFRF requested and received a permit to place a large Winter Solstice sign at the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson to counter a life-size nativity scene erected at the urging of Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant and the 9/11 Remembrance Foundation to "honor our troops."

Bryant told a reporter, "Recognizing our troops at Christmas, praying for our troops, I think it's a perfect fit."

Members were asked Dec. 21 to write Bryant to ask him to show respect for nonbelievers — including atheists in foxholes — for those of minority faiths and for the secular U.S. Constitution.

It was noted that FFRF would gladly remove its sign if religious displays were kept out of the State Capitol.

We pick 'distant, uncaring farce'

USA Weekend magazine headlined its Dec. 19 cover "How Americans Imagine GOD." The word "GOD," against a yellow backdrop similar to rays of sun and topped with what looked like a halo, was written with the words readers supposedly submitted about who or what they think god is. The biggest words visible: love, creator, soul, universal. Can you say fluff piece right before Christmas?

The article asked, will "Americans, in the face of unemployment, home foreclosures, two wars and an uncertain economic future, describe the Almighty as a wrathful, cold critic of our failings, or maybe a distant, uncaring force?" The article and the response from readers overwhelmingly gave "god" credit for all life's good things — love, goodness, peace, "brotherhood."

Writer Cathy Lynn Grossman, a religion reporter for USA Today, claimed that 5% of those who chimed in were nonbelievers. Aside from that brief mention, nonbelievers (and Muslims) were excluded from the story. However, 15% of Americans identify as non-religious (ARIS 2008).

FFRF asked members to use their unbelieving voices to let Grossman and USA Weekend readers know they don't believe in a god, and that readers are literally "imagining" a god, since there is no evidence of one.

Muslim prayer time protested in school

The Foundation sent a letter Jan. 3 following up on an earlier complaint about Edison High School, Edison, N.J., facilitating Friday prayer times in the school gym for Muslim students.

FFRF Senior Attorney Rebecca Markert's initial letter, last October, noted the principal's September memo to all staff regarding Friday prayer called Jumma or Jumu'ah. (A new memo, with later calendar dates added, went out in November.)

Markert wrote, "Our complainant informs us that some of the Muslim students 'have been granted permission to perform their Friday prayers during rotating periods, 10, 11, 12.' We further understand that these students are excused from these periods for 15 minutes in order to pray. It is also our information and understanding that these students are granted access to the high school auditorium for their prayers."

The district responded negatively Nov. 1 to FFRF's request that the practice stop.

"Given the history of this practice, we believe the Friday prayer practice will continue during 2011," Markert's second letter said. "Edison High School violates the Establishment Clause each time Muslim students are released from their normal classroom obligations to pray in the school auditorium."

FFRF protests kindergarten blessing

FFRF sent a letter of complaint Dec. 6 to the Giles County Board of Education in Pulaski, Tenn., about a constitutional violation at Pulaski Elementary, where a local complainant's kindergarten student came home singing:

*"Oh, the Lord's been good to me.
And so I thank the Lord
For giving me the things I need:
The sun, the rain and the appleseed;
Oh, the Lord's been good to me."*

The song, sometimes titled "Johnny Appleseed Grace," is in the genre of Christian prayer songs and is often sung as a table blessing.

"We ask that you commence an immediate investigation into this allegation and take prompt action to halt prayers occurring at public schools in your district," wrote Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney. "It is well settled that a public school teacher may not lead, direct or ask her students to engage in prayer, even if it's delivered in the form of a song."

Preserving nation's secular motto

The Congressional Prayer Caucus, headed by Rep. Randy Forbes, R-Va., chastised President Obama in December for praising America's original motto, "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of Many, One) during a speech in Indonesia. In his letter, Forbes ignorantly wrote Obama that E Pluribus Unum (originally chosen by a committee of Franklin, Adams and Jefferson) is not the national motto. Forbes insisted "In God We Trust" is the motto. In fact, both are national mottos, and E Pluribus Unum still appears on the Great Seal of the United States and on U.S. currency. The godly motto was unfortunately adopted after a religious lobbying campaign during the Red Scare in 1956.

FFRF sent a Dec. 7 Action Alert to encourage members to educate Forbes and the 41 congressional co-signers of the letter that showed a total disregard for the constitutional principle of state-church separation. Members were also encouraged to write or phone the White House to express thanks for recognizing America's secular heritage and to write letters to the editor of their local papers.

FFRF protests many, many religious displays

FFRF got 50 inquiries about religious displays on public property during the last holiday season and sent 32 letters of complaint, several of which are still pending. Letters, sometimes more than one, went to:

Venango, Pa.; Brookville, Ind. (multiple letters to Town Council and County Commission); Gladwin County, Mich.; Whitehall, Ohio; Waltham, Mass.; Hawkins County, Tenn.; Altoona, Wis.; Paducah, Ky.; Cove Lake State Park, Tenn.; Prineville, Ore.; Canonsburg, Pa.; Smithton, Ill.; Cincinnati, Ohio; San Fernando, Calif.; Ellwood City, Pa.; Frankenmuth, Mich.; Eureka Springs, Ark.; Milwaukee County, Wis.; Addyston, Ohio; Wabash County, Ind.; Port Edwards, Wis.; Burlington, Mass.; Cheboygan County, Mich.; Whiteville, Tenn.; Breckenridge, Colo.; City University of New York (Hunter College); Wabash, Ind.; and Tempe, Ariz. (Hayden Butte Preserve).

FFRF asked for members' help Dec. 21 after sending a letter to the mayor of Marion, Ill., objecting to two large nativity scenes, complete with loud religious music and other religious displays, prominently displayed on city property. A manger scene was placed inside City Hall in picture windows facing the front of the building.

A couple had asked to put up a Wiccan display for the Dec. 21 celebration of Yule, but the mayor turned it down. "The mayor and local papers need to hear from voices of reason who believe in upholding the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. Let them know you disagree with

religious displays on government property. Suggest they move the displays to private grounds," the Foundation recommended.

No honor among these thieves

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott calls this Canonsburg, Pa., situation "Christians on their worst behavior."

FFRF was contacted by a member in Canonsburg and other Pennsylvania members about a nativity display that has been placed by the Knights of Columbus in front of the Canonsburg Borough building for years. It was temporarily removed from government property in early December after another resident, Meagan Hartley, complained.

Hartley reported she received threats for her complaint. On Dec. 13, the Canonsburg Borough Council voted 9-0 to again erect the nativity scene. On Dec. 16, FFRF requested the rules or procedures for citizens to place displays on public property under the state's Right-to-Know Law. Borough Manager Terry Hazlet responded saying that no policy existed but that the borough was formulating a policy that would allow other displays.

A local group put up a sign Dec. 22 that included a large "A" and read, "Canonsburg Atheists & Agnostics — Have a safe and secular season."

Within 24 hours, the sign was stolen.

Empire State owner wouldn't knuckle under

Anthony Malkin, owner of the Empire State Building, was named one of 2010's "Knuckleheads of the Year" by the New York Daily News on Jan. 1 for refusing to light the building in blue and white for Mother Teresa's birthday last August. Instead of caving to major pressure from Catholic groups and those unaware of the "unsaintly" side of Mother Teresa, Malkin decided to light the building to commemorate the 90th anniversary of ratification of the 19th Amendment granting women suffrage.

An Action Alert asked for letters to the Daily News editor to object to calling Malkin a "knucklehead" and to support him for honoring feminists instead of an anti-choice "saint" who opposed birth control.

'Happy Holidays' makes Florida senator grumpy

State Sen. Gary Siplin introduced a resolution to recognize "Merry Christmas" as the state of Florida's "official greeting" for Dec. 25. The resolution stated, in part, "WHEREAS, many Christians and non-Christians throughout the United States and the rest of the world celebrate Christmas as a time to cherish and serve others. . ."

Siplin said, according to the St. Petersburg Times, "When I go through the stores people say, 'Happy Holidays,' but we all know why people exchange gifts. We all know it's going to be Christmas, Jesus' birth, on Saturday. Why not say 'Merry Christmas' for that day and not camouflage it?"

FFRF's Jan. 6 Action Alert said, "If you are offended by this Christian-promoting resolution, please send a brief, polite message to Senator Siplin objecting to adopting 'Merry Christmas' as the official state greeting."

Sign up for FFRF e-releases and action alerts at: ffrf.org/signup/news

It Pays To Complain

String of FFRF legal victories

Bell ringers moved from postal grounds

An FFRF letter Dec. 23 swiftly resolved a violation in which Salvation Army bell ringers were soliciting funds on U.S. Post Office property in Elgin, Ill. The Foundation's letter included photos of a bell ringer at the postal entrance.

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, wrote: "The Post Office cannot allow a Salvation Army bell ringer to solicit donations on postal property. [Postal regulations] state specifically that 'soliciting alms and contributions . . . or impeding access to or egress from Post Offices are prohibited.'"

Elgin's postmaster first phoned the Foundation to say she was not aware of those postal regulations or that the Salvation Army was a religious organization. The Salvation Army is not just a religious organization; it is a Christian denomination. The postmaster agreed that religious affiliation is moot since it was a violation of postal regulations.

She followed up with a letter Jan. 14: "I have contacted the Salvation Army and informed them that they would not be allowed to stand in front of Postal Property while ringing their bell. This will not be an issue in the future in Elgin."

School will limit religious dance group

FFRF objected in early January to Gaston County Schools, Gastonia, N.C., hosting religious-based assemblies. A Dec. 7 assembly at Webb Street School, a special-needs facility, featured Elements of Dance, self-described as "a school of dance where students learn technical skill in ballet, modern, tap, and hip-hop while worshipping the Lord. 'For Him we live and move and have our being. Acts 17:28.'"

On Jan. 18, a school district attorney spoke with Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, and confirmed that Christian music had been played and that the school had planned to bring the dance company back in the spring of 2011.

FFRF was informed that the principal has agreed that no future performance may include religious content, and that all assemblies must be secular in nature.

Prayer strikes out before Virginia games

FFRF helped stop a 13-year state-church violation in Sterling, Va., involving Potomac Falls High School baseball coaches leading players in pre-game prayer.

"Before each game, we go to left field, take a knee, take our hats off, and the team prays," one player said in a story headlined "Playing on a prayer" in a school publication. "Coach says the same thing every time," another player added. "It really helps us get ready for the game."

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Mark-

ert wrote a letter last Sept. 23 to object to the unconstitutional tradition. Federal law "dictates government employees should refrain from actively participating in religious activities while acting within their governmental role to avoid any perception of government endorsement of religion and/or excessive entanglement with religion."

An attorney for the district responded Jan. 20: "We have taken steps to insure that administrators and coaches are aware of the current status of the law and strictly adhere to those parameters in the future."

FFRF stops Florida school staff's religion

Faculty and staff at Clay County Schools in Green Cove Springs, Fla., were told to stop taking part in student-initiated religious activities and prohibited from promoting religion in their official capacities after the district received a letter from FFRF on Oct. 26, 2010.

A high school varsity soccer coach regularly encouraged her players to attend Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings, and her team participated in an FCA-sponsored "team bonding retreat." The coach ended one e-mail to her team: "Discover and grow strong in the word of God." The previous year, she led the soccer team in prayer before each game.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert pointed out in her six-page letter that the coach's constant encouragement for student involvement in " 'student-led' FCA is constitutionally problematic. Prayer before athletic events in your district is illegal and inappropriate and must cease immediately."

An attorney for the district agreed with Markert's analysis and responded on Dec. 17 that the coach and principal were told that "there should be no school employee participation in activities such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes and 'Meet Me At the Pole' or any other religious extracurricular clubs, organizations or groups."

"Additionally, there are to be no e-mails with personal testimony, no encouraging students to get involved with FCA, and no encouragement of any kind by the coach or any other school employee to get involved in any religious activity."

'Inspiration' graduation out in West Virginia

A high school in Gilmer County, W.V., finally confirmed that it held its graduation last May without an "inspiration" after receiving numerous letters from FFRF, starting in August 2009. The graduation ceremony in 2009 had included an "inspiration," which was actually a Christian invocation, and FFRF had concerns that the 2010 graduation would again schedule unconstitutional prayers.

After four follow-up letters and calls between the district superintendent and Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, the principal of the high school finally responded Dec. 19: "I have attached a copy of the program from Graduation Ceremonies held May 28, 2010, which indicates that no invocation, prayer, or inspiration was scheduled."

Disclaimers ordered for religious fliers

FFRF protested fliers advertising a religious "See You at the Pole" event last Sept. 22 at Wilbur Cross High



PLAYING on a prayer

Junior Nick Fernandez is the only new player to Potomac Falls baseball. He came into the program this year when he moved to Virginia. "There is really good chemistry on the team," said Fernandez. "Most of us have been on the same team since freshman year," said junior Stephen Fisher. "We are all really good friends on and off the field," said Fisher.

One thing Fernandez likes about the varsity baseball program is their praying. "Before each game, we go to left field, take a knee, take our hats off, and the team prays," said Fernandez. The team prays while the other team warms up in the infield. "Coach says the same thing every time," said junior Ryan Miller. "It really helps us get ready for the game."

Other players like Fisher say the praying helps them get ready for the game. "It influences me because I am somewhat religious. It's more of a confidence thing and brings everyone together," said Fisher. "I feel like I have to step up my playing and it makes me a better player."

On the team, "we have to learn how to

This is from the spring supplement of the Potomac Falls High School yearbook. It's been removed from the Sterling, Va., public school's website, thanks to FFRF.

School in New Haven, Conn. The flier stated: "Take your place in history with millions of other students on this Global Day of Student Prayer. See You at the Pole can provide a powerful connection between you and the other Christian students on your campus to pray and reach out all year long. Be bold! Be unashamed! And stand in prayer with other Christian Youth for your Generation to be changed."

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, wrote: "The school district should not approve fliers or posters for distribution or display unless an appropriate disclaimer is included to disassociate the school district from the religious organization or event. Without such a disclaimer, students are apt to believe that the school is endorsing the prayer engaged in during the 'See You at the Pole' event."

Future fliers advertising religious groups' events at the school "should contain language to remove any perception of government endorsement," she added.

The district responded Dec. 2: "New Haven Public Schools does not approve fliers or posters for display and/or distribution unless an appropriate disclaimer is included. Wilbur Cross has a newly appointed principal and I have met with the leadership team stressing the aforementioned concern. We are mindful of the religion/state concerns and have taken the necessary steps to avoid additional situations."

School drops shrine from field trip

On Nov. 26, the Foundation alerted the superintendent of Alexander Central School District, Alexander, N.Y., about the unconstitutionality of a scheduled 10th-grade field trip in April that included a stop at the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Md.

"Including a stop at a Catholic shrine, whose mission is for 'visitors to [enrich] spiritually through their pilgrimage to the site where [Seton] taught, worked, prayed and died' during a public school trip, appears to be an impermissible school endorsement and furthering of Catholic doctrine," wrote Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney. "The Constitution's prohibition against school-sponsored religious activities cannot be overcome by claiming such activities are 'voluntary,'" Markert noted.

The superintendent responded Jan. 4 that the school "removed a stop at Seton Shrine from the itinerary."

'Spiritual' staff e-mail tag removed

The Beaverton, Ore., School District responded Dec. 10 to an FFRF complaint by Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott about a school staff member who used

an e-mail signature that said, in part: "We are spiritual beings going through a temporary human experience."

Camellia Osterink, legal counsel, said that while the district disagreed that the words were religious, it did agree that they were "not an appropriate use of district technology."

Separating church and polling place

FFRF member C. Ryan Shannon stood up for his right to be free from religious encroachment by contacting his Oklahoma election board about a sticker on the door at the entrance to his polling place in an Episcopal church. The sticker said "Please visit our church on Sunday!"

The election board asked the church to remove the sign after Shannon objected. "The church responded that it was 'a permanent sign which is there every day,' — although it was a sticker and not a sign — and said they would reroute voters through a different door during voting hours," he said.

A board employee checked the proposed alternate entry but determined it wasn't handicapped accessible: "I understand from my staff that this signage you alerted us about is a permanent sign that appears to be taped to the door which stays there for all activities at the church, not just for voting."

A "permanent" sign taped to the door?

But, the employee told Shannon: "The church administration has said they would cover this sign for us on Election Day, and that if they should forget to do so, our inspector at the precinct will have in the supplies a sheet of paper large enough to cover the sign. We will do our best to see that this is taken care of on Election Day. Hopefully, this solution will satisfy your concern. Please let us know if we may be of further assistance."

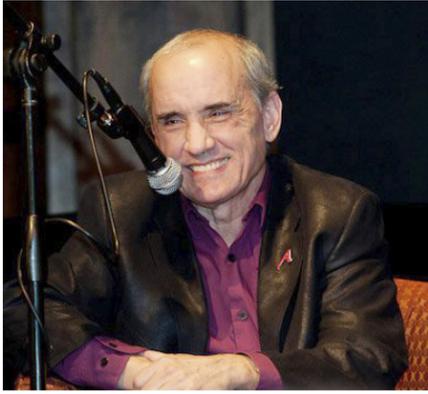
He's very glad he raised the issue. "It has allowed me to feel empowered against the overwhelming presence of religion here."

Shannon adds, "I was surprised to see McAlester, Okla., mentioned in Freethought Today. I was once a substitute teacher in that school system, where my niece still attends. I was saddened to hear that W.O.W [Worship On Wednesdays] was proselytizing on campus and giving special privileges to its members, yet very grateful that there was an FFRF member who stood up to it."

"Thanks to her parents, my niece is being raised to experience life in all its wondrous aspects. We don't want to limit her experiences based on some archaic tribal texts that denigrate intellect, women and her gay uncle. I sometimes feel like I am lost in the wilderness of crazy and inane believers, then I get Freethought Today and I feel a bit better."

— By Bonnie Gutsch

Another good read from Dan Barker



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker did the first signing and promotion for his new book, *The Good Atheist*, Jan. 9 in the Langston Room at Busboys and Poets in Washington, D.C., with the room packed with about 100 freethinkers. The name refers to Langston Hughes, who worked as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel in the 1930s before gaining recognition as a poet. Hughes was a freethinker.

How does an atheist respond to the question, “What is the purpose of life?”

Dan Barker’s *The Good Atheist* (Ulysses Press, 2011) is not another book about how to be good without God. Although most atheists are indeed good people, the word “Good” in the title does not refer to moral good, as in “you are a good boy.” It refers to practical good, as in “you did a good job.” The main purpose of the book is purpose itself.

The Good Atheist is Barker’s response

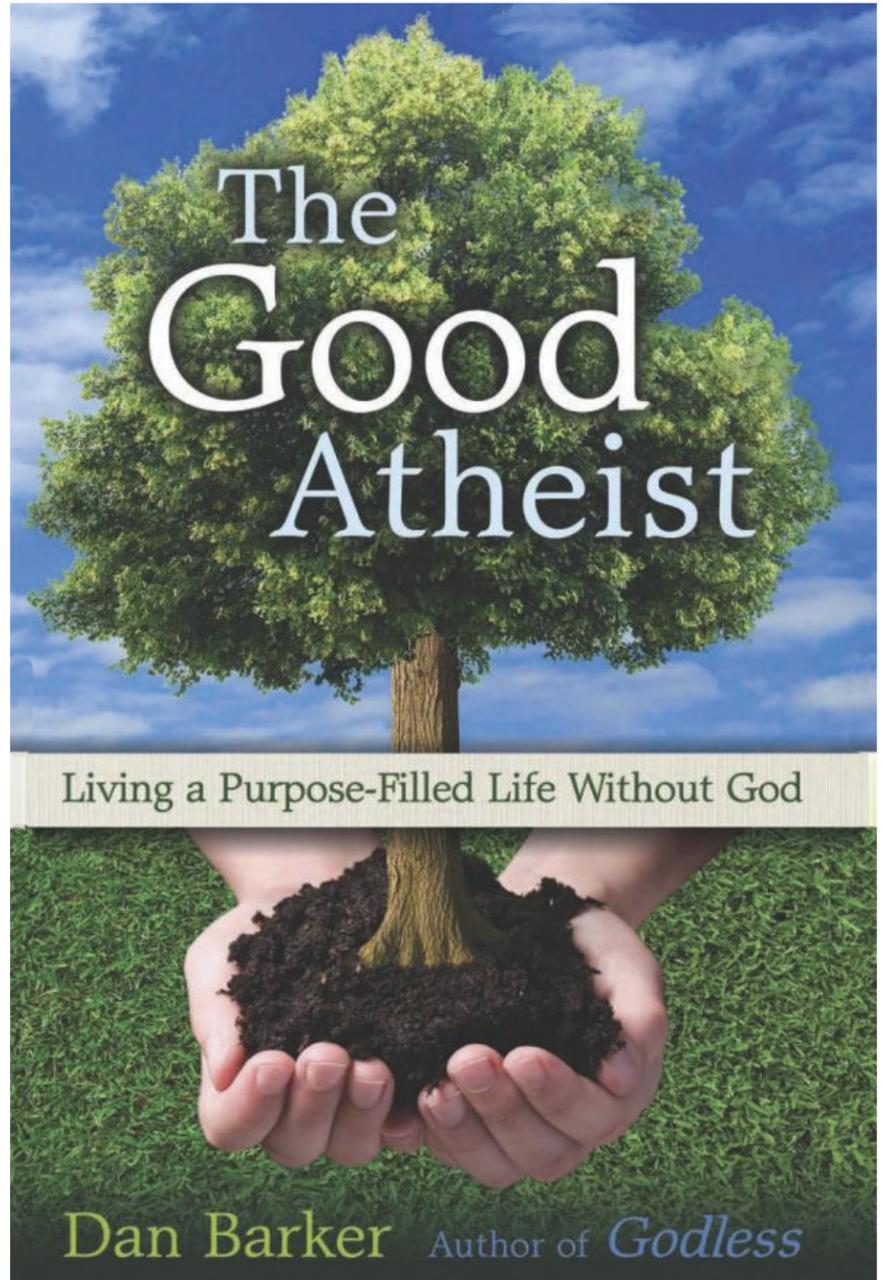
to Pastor Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*, in which Warren claims that “Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope.”

In his opening essay, “Life Driven Purpose,” Barker debunks that prejudicial and false statement, showing that it is in fact the other way around, that the point of biblical Christianity is to submit as a slave to a master who demands total obedience and worship. That is not purpose — it is a surrender of purpose.

To prove empirically that Warren is wrong, Part 2 of *The Good Atheist*, “Profiles in Nonbelief,” presents short bios and quotes of more than 300 contemporary and historical atheists and agnostics who indeed live (d) lives of immense purpose: actors, artists, authors, composers, feminists, human rights activists, journalists, performers, playwrights, philanthropists, philosophers, poets, political leaders, psychiatrists and psychologists, reformers, revolutionaries, scientists and songwriters.

“There is no purpose of life,” Barker writes, “but that does not mean there is no purpose in life.” Life does not need purpose — purpose needs life. “Purpose does not come from puffing up the glory of an imaginary praise-hungry slavemaster in a magical world,” Barker continues, “but from solving problems to make a better world of this, the only world we have.”

The Good Atheist is available at bookstores, online for \$15 at ffrf.org/shop/books/ and by mail to FFRF, Attn: Sales Dept., Box 750, Madison, WI 53701.



“Readers familiar with Dan Barker’s eloquently persuasive books, *Losing Faith in Faith* and *Godless*, will recognize here that same powerful reasoning, as he distinguishes between religions pretensions and a sound personal philosophy. And readers will surely be grateful for his invaluable compendium of illustrious freethinkers in all the arts, sciences, and noble causes — a valuable encyclopedia for anyone seeking the companionship of distinguished fellow humanists.” — Philip Appleman

Foreword for *The Good Atheist*

By Julia Sweeney

Iwish I had had this book to read when I was going through my struggles with faith. Back then, I knew that the arguments for god were weak, but I wasn’t sure where to begin making sense of life without god. It took years of reading and thinking to spin my way out. I’m still spinning my way out, and just reading this book helped me organize my thoughts — things I already knew and understood seem clearer and more grounded. I appreciate that Dan has taken the time and done the research to write this book. I bet you’re going to love reading it.

Letting go of faith and accepting that I’m a free agent able to make choices, find purpose and take action based on my own personal desires, and my own personal volition was ultimate-

ly liberating. Years of religious instruction and indoctrination were hard to undo. Life was easier with prescribed choices and a premade list of what was right and wrong. On the other hand, living without god — or some divinely inspired purpose — can be scary as well. It’s hard to make complicated choices. And not all the choices we make lead to the outcomes we wish for. Sometimes what we wish for isn’t what we want anyway!

When you’re religious, there’s always an answer that blunts the edge off anything catastrophic. Or guides you along, lulling you into a state of babyish calm, when things are going well. But real life isn’t like that. There are real catastrophes. There are really unfortunate outcomes. There is also real success and real serendipitous joyful accidents — coincidences and hard work that pay off more than we ever expected. That’s life.

I love when Dan writes, “Life doesn’t need purpose, purpose needs life.” That is so true. I understand this to be the directed energy that a person — alive, cognizant and with purpose —

can bring to affect himself or herself and the world.

Our consciousness is like having been given — by evolution — a kind of car. To me it’s like a Ferrari that can run really fast and is very powerful. However, the religious are taught that their mind is more like a train car that needs an engine to pull it along. Without the engine at the front of the train, the car is stranded, and off the tracks it can’t go anywhere.

But that’s not true. Our minds have tremendous power. We can behave with great insight and discipline and compassion. Dan’s book elaborates all those myths that the church and the religious keep on promoting, even when they’ve been shown to be wrong over and over again. The religious do this because they need believers in order to stay in power. Also, people gravitate toward this ideology because, in the short run, faith is comforting and easier. But in the long run, it’s very costly.

I feel I am a much better citizen of my community and world and family because I no longer believe in god. I make decisions on my own. It’s often

difficult, and I am often not always in lock step with the thinking of others. But in general I do less harm, I am more compassionate, I use actions instead of intentions (or prayer), and I am generally tougher and more resilient without god in my life.

I still get sad, I still make mistakes, I still brood, and I still get depressed from time to time. But now I’m not grasping at supernatural concepts or fuzzily thought out New Agey woo-woo. I rely on evidence, and I have an understanding of what makes for good evidence.

This book will be shocking and powerful if you’re still making the transition out of religious belief, and it will be a great reminder of why you have confidence in your worldview if you’re already a nonbeliever.

I loved Dan’s first book, *Losing Faith in Faith*. With this book, Dan goes further and deeper. He has matured in his thinking, just as I am trying to do the same. He’s made it all much easier for me.

So . . . enjoy.

Legal scholar addresses FFRF convention

‘Monumental questions’ for court

Journalist Linda Greenhouse spoke at the 33rd national FFRF convention Oct. 29, 2010, in Madison, Wis., and answered many questions afterward from the audience.



By Linda Greenhouse

It's a pleasure to be here. I've only been in Madison a couple of hours, and I've had really interesting conversations already. I thought the lieutenant governor [who had just spoken to the audience via video] was really cool. As Annie Laurie remarked, she and I have known each other, without ever meeting face to face, for many years. I really am an admirer of the work of the Foundation.

When I was covering the court on a daily basis, there was a constant drip, drip, drip of the effort to keep religion in the public square. The briefs that [FFRF] lawyers filed and just your general take, I always found refreshing and very enlightening.

I have a new book out that is an effort to reconstruct the conversation about abortion that was going on in the United States for the decade before the court ruled in *Roe v. Wade*. My co-author and colleague at Yale, Reva Siegel, and I spent the better part of a year immersed in archives and legal papers of long-forgotten cases and personal papers and so on — all kinds of interesting stuff just to try to look back without the distorting lens of *Roe v. Wade* and see what the world really looked like at the time the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe*. One thing that really comes through in our research is the role of the Catholic Church in maintaining opposition to abortion at the first glimmers of reform in the early 1960s.

People talk about the backlash against *Roe v. Wade*, and actually that's a misunderstanding of history. It was actually more of a "frontlash" — well before the court ruled, the church was reacting the minute anybody mentioned reform of the criminal abortion laws — abortion was a crime, of course,

in every state at the beginning of the 1960s. The church was very strategic and spun off the National Right to Life Committee as if it were an independent organization, to start speaking in a secular voice to gain allies outside of its own faithful. It was very successful in doing that.

The anti-abortion movement in its original form, before the evangelicals made common cause with the Catholics, was actually a Catholic movement. Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell didn't preach his first sermon against abortion until 1979. People think of the evangelicals as really having driven the anti-abortion movement. It's really not true. The immediate years preceding *Roe*, when the winds of reform were blowing everywhere and every religious denomination was called upon to issue some policy statement about abortion — the National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention — these groups that we would think of now as on the right of the Protestant spectrum, were not in fact categorically opposed to abortion. They were open to reform. It was only the Catholic Church that was categorically opposed to it.

The title of my talk, "Monumental Questions for the Supreme Court," reflects a striking reality about our legal landscape, which is that case after case, year after year, Supreme Court term after Supreme Court term, courts are asked to validate religious belief and observance by upholding the display of religious monuments on public land when such displays are challenged as violations of the Establishment Clause and of the Constitution's protection for the separation of church and state.

I know that FFRF has been at the forefront of many of these battles. As a separationist myself, I commend you for this. This organization has created and obviously is continuing to create a very proud and important legacy, so I feel there's not a lot I can teach you about the subject. I'm not here as somebody who's preaching to you, but teaching you. I see my role as kind of synthesizing and pulling together some threads that I've seen on the legal landscape that might clarify some of this disputed terrain and put some of the current developments in perspective.

When I agree to speak about some legal subject, I have to worry about being overtaken by events because the law might change. But there's little chance of being overtaken by events in the battle over keeping religious monuments standing, because that's just going to go on forever, it seems. In fact, the 8-foot-high cross on a hilltop in the Mojave Desert in southeastern California, the display of which didn't seem to bother the Supreme Court very much in a really preposterous decision last year — that cross, although the court said that the government didn't have to take it down, has already disappeared. Somebody stole it, but the case goes on.

These disputes play out constantly in other contexts, not just about the display of monuments. Next Wednesday, in a case in which FFRF has filed an excellent brief, the Supreme Court

Photography by Brent Nicastro



Linda Greenhouse signs copies of her book, *Becoming Justice Blackmun*.

Anyone who cares about the separation issue ought to miss Justice Stevens acutely.

will hear arguments in *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*. It's the latest iteration in the endless effort to channel public money to religious schools.

When I was a very young reporter, before I started covering the court, I covered the New York Legislature. My ambition was to be a political reporter. Those were the days in the 1970s when the appetite in New York to channel money to parochial schools was just endless, and bills kept passing. The Legislature would find new ways of doing it, the Supreme Court would strike it down, and they'd go back to the Legislature and tweak it a little bit, and the Supreme Court would strike it down.

This constant dialectic wouldn't be happening today, because the Legislature would tweak it a little bit and the Supreme Court would say, "Oh, fine. Thank you." This new case that's going to be argued on Wednesday is one of those.

The government can't directly appropriate money for religious schools, and since states and school districts really aren't too interested in going the route of tuition vouchers, for all kinds of political and policy reasons, states are trying to do something else. Arizona has set up an amazingly convoluted system that lets taxpayers shift a portion of the tax payment — a direct credit right off the top of the tax bill — to a nonprofit that then provides scholarships with that money for use at private schools. But most of the private schools are religious schools, so it's basically a way of taking tax dollars and passing it right into the hands of these religious schools. It's really a pretext concealed in a subterfuge. Rube Goldberg, if he were an artist at the Supreme Court,

would even have trouble designing a poster that would show how this is supposed to work. It's a case that's really very cynical.

The court has a very good website [supremecourt.gov] these days. You can follow cases easily and get transcripts within a few hours after the case is argued. A new practice this term is that every Friday, they put up the audio of every case that was argued during that week.

Cross in the desert

You'd have been hard-pressed to make up the facts in the Mojave cross case called *Salazar v. Buono*. The court ended up by sort of upholding it only by finding that the display of a cross standing alone on Sunrise Rock did not amount to an endorsement of the Christian religion. How could that be, you might ask? You don't have to be a member of FFRF to say, "What the — run that by me again."

I'm not actually sure that I can explain how the court reached that decision because the case produced six separate opinions, none of them for a majority of the court. The complicating factor was that the few square feet of ground on which the cross stood is no longer technically owned by the government. After Frank Buono sued successfully for an Establishment Clause violation, Congress intervened and transferred the land to the VFW — the idea being, "It's not on government land. It's on private land, so what's the problem?"

Did this government action have the necessary secular purpose? Is trying to get a case out of the hands of a federal judge, which basically was the motivation here, a secular purpose? The lower courts didn't think so and issued an injunction to block the transfer. Then, last spring, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for a plurality of the Supreme Court that the cross wasn't religious in the first place.

Kennedy said the cross, put up as a World War I monument, was "intended simply to honor our nation's fallen soldiers." To remove it would "convey disrespect for those the cross was seen as honoring."



Linda shares a smile with Marilee Harrison, Wisconsin FFRF Lifetime Member and volunteer.

Note the use of the word “seen.” Seen by whom? If you or I saw a lone cross on top of a barren hillside on what for acres or miles around was federal property (it’s a national preserve, in fact), World War I and its fallen soldiers would not immediately leap to mind. Or if it did, might it not occur to at least some of us that not all of the fallen soldiers were necessarily Christian?

No matter. “The goal of avoiding government endorsement does not require eradication of all religious symbols in the public realm,” Justice Kennedy tells us, which is obviously a truism that can’t begin to answer the questions posed by this case.

The court vacated the injunction and sent the case back for consideration of whether some less “drastic” remedy such as a sign making clear that the government doesn’t own the cross might satisfy a “reasonable observer” that no endorsement was involved.

This incoherent decision was no great surprise, because the oral argument that preceded it had been truly bizarre. In his colloquy with the plaintiff’s lawyer, Justice Antonin Scalia insisted that the cross should be seen as honoring all of the dead and not just the Christian soldiers. He seemed unable to understand why anyone would find the solitary cross inappropriate for that purpose. “What would you have them erect” he asked the lawyer, “some conglomerate of a cross, a Star of David and a Muslim half moon and star?”

The lawyer, who happened to be the son and grandson of Jewish war veterans replied, “Well, Justice Scalia, the cross is the most common symbol of the resting place of Christians. I have been in Jewish cemeteries, and there is never a cross on the tombstone of a Jew.”

Justice Scalia: “I don’t think you can leap from that to the conclusion that the only war dead that the cross honors are the Christian war dead. I think that’s an outrageous conclusion.”

Commandments, holiday displays

Last year a federal appeals court ruled in a dispute over a Ten Commandments monument on the lawn of an Oklahoma county courthouse. The 8-foot-tall monument had been erected by the Board of Commissioners at the request of a constituent, a construction worker and part-time minister who told the commissioners that, “The Lord has burdened my heart” to create and place the monument in that spot.

It was dedicated in a public ceremony with 17 churches represented.

A county commissioner, not a minister, commented to the media, “The good Lord died for me; I can stand for him. I’m a Christian and I believe in this.”

The American Civil Liberties Union and a local resident, also a Christian, but a different kind of Christian, sued but lost in federal district court. A three-judge appeals court reversed the decision, finding the display unconstitutional because in context, given its history, and how it came to be standing there on the courthouse lawn, a reasonable observer would understand it represented endorsement of religion by government.

The county appealed to the full appeals court, which refused to rehear the case on a 9-9 vote. Three of the judges who wanted to review the case wrote a dissenting opinion. They said the court’s action reflected a “regrettable misapprehension that recognition of the role of religion in this country’s founding history, traditions, and laws, is to be strictly excluded from the civic sphere.”



There are many other cases on religious displays, with each having a different, interesting twist. There was a case from Pennsylvania called *Modrovich v. Allegheny County*, a lawsuit over a Ten Commandments plaque affixed since 1918 to an exterior courthouse wall. Two atheists sued to have it removed and lost.

Two judges, a majority of a panel of the 3rd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, held that in the context of several other courthouse historical displays, a reasonable observer (always a reasonable observer) would not view the plaque as an official endorsement of religion.

Allegheny County has plenty of experience with such disputes. In a landmark 1989 church-state case, the court evaluated two holiday displays in downtown Pittsburgh. One was a crèche, donated by the Catholic Holy Name Society, on the grand staircase

Prepare yourselves for seeing lots of Ten Commandments in public places.

of the courthouse. The other was an 18-foot-tall menorah placed outside the City-County building next to a 45-foot Christmas tree. The tree belonged to the city, and the menorah belonged to Chabad-Lubavitch, an Orthodox Jewish group, although it was erected, taken down and stored every year by the city.

The Supreme Court held that the stand-alone crèche couldn’t stand. It effectively endorsed a patently Christian message, the court said, which made it impermissible. But the menorah’s message was “not exclusively religious,” because the Hanukkah holiday itself has “both religious and secular dimensions.” Really?

A Christmas tree, the court said, was not a religious symbol at all. The court also concluded the display was a secular civic acknowledgement of two religious traditions: “The combination of the tree and the menorah communicates not a simultaneous endorsement of both the Christian and Jewish faiths, but instead a secular celebration of Christmas coupled with an acknowledgement of Hanukkah as a contemporaneous alternative tradition.”

The decision struck me as quite odd when I had to write about it 20 years ago. Reading it again in preparing for this talk, it seems odder still. Here was a court that at the time contained not a single Jewish justice, but still had the nerve to expound on the meaning of Hanukkah and declare it to be a contemporaneous alternative to Christmas. The court was obviously struggling to extricate itself from a doctrinal box and in the process managed to aggrandize, mischaracterize and insult Hanukkah all at once.

I spoke at a law school conference last summer in Israel. I later was interviewed by an Israeli reporter who wanted to know how U.S. courts have been treating Jewish observances these days. When I told him that Hanukkah had officially been declared a contemporaneous alternative to Christmas, the reporter was speechless.

Faux ‘Foundations’

Many of you probably remember the 2005 case of *McCreary County v. ACLU of Kentucky*, which challenged a Ten Commandments display that had been posted in its first iteration in 1999 on courthouse walls in two Kentucky counties.

After the ACLU sued, the counties changed their displays. They added framed copies of other documents, including the Magna Carta and the lyric of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The county executives then claimed in the litigation that their purpose all along had not been religious — although it started out with just the Ten Commandments — but rather to celebrate the “Foundations of American Law and Government.” Remember that phrase.

The Supreme Court in 2005 declared the displays unconstitutional. Justice David Souter wrote a majority opinion in which he said essentially that while he was born at night, it wasn’t *last* night. He said that the claim of secular civic purpose couldn’t

be taken seriously and that observers — that reasonable observer again, this time actually reasonable — wouldn’t be naive enough to accept it. A reasonable observer would know the history, Justice Souter said, and “would probably suspect that the counties were simply reaching for any way to keep a religious document on the walls of courthouses that are constitutionally required to embody religious neutrality.”

However, and this is a much bigger “however” than I realized at the time, Justice Souter also said that the court did not “have occasion here to hold that a sacred text can never be integrated constitutionally into a governmental display on the subject of law or American history.” Why he said that, I don’t know, but it was a 5-4 opinion, and he might have needed to say it to hold on to a fifth vote.

Religious groups and their government allies all over the country have taken this as a green light to go ahead. They’ve been placing “Foundations” displays, with the Ten Commandments, of course, because that’s obviously the point, all over the place. The South Carolina Legislature passed a law specifically to permit such displays to be erected “in a visible public location in the public buildings of this state” as long as the Ten Commandments were described in the exact words that the Kentucky courthouses used: as “the moral background of the Declaration of Independence and the foundation of our legal tradition.”

Meanwhile, *McCreary County* has been revived because the Supreme Court decision wasn’t actually a final judgment. The case went back in 2008 to the federal district court, which again ruled against the counties. This past summer, a federal appeals court affirmed the district court judgment over a vigorous dissent by one judge, who criticized what he called “the Supreme Court’s persistent hostility to religion,” while praising the “powerful and logically compelling dissent” that Justice Scalia had filed in the original case in 2005.

Two days ago, Liberty Counsel attorney Matt Staver, also the dean of Liberty University School of Law, which is Pat Robertson’s law school, announced the counties’ intention to file another Supreme Court appeal. [The petition, *McCreary County, KY v. American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky*, No. 10-566, was filed on Oct. 27, 2010]. Staver observed that it is “pretty clear to everyone that the court has changed since 2005,” as indeed it has. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor is now gone, and her successor, Justice Samuel Alito, is not likely to see the issue the same way.

The greatest modern separationist, Justice John Paul Stevens, is gone, too. We don’t know where his successor, Justice Elena Kagan, stands on church-state issues. I assume she stands basically where he did.

But even if she would vote the same way, I doubt that she’ll bring, at least in her early years on the court, the same clarifying passion that Justice Stevens brought to such issues as, for instance, the role of religion in the abortion debate. He was the only justice ever willing to say out loud in published opinions that the assertion that life begins at conception is a statement of religious belief, one that the state ought to be prevented by the Establishment Clause from using as the basis for public policy. Anyone who cares about the separation issue ought to miss Justice

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Continued from previous page

Stevens acutely.

The new Ten Commandments petition raises four main questions on the issue for the Supreme Court, but the two most interesting are these:

- “Whether the passage of nearly 10 years, a change in government decision-makers, official renunciation of prior actions, and a display and resolution setting forth legitimate secular purposes are constitutionally significant facts sufficient enough to erase a so-called taint of religious purpose found in prior displays found on a courthouse wall containing the Ten Commandments.”

They’re saying that enough time has passed — basically, that this is now and that was then, and you should now say it’s OK. That’s kind of a Kentucky courthouse-specific question. Then they ask a very significant further question:

- “Whether a new test for Establishment Clause purposes should be set forth by this court when the government displays or recognizes historical or otherwise passive expressions or displays of religion.”

If the court agrees that there should be a new test — no longer the endorsement test, no longer the so-called Lemon test — that would open the door to pretty much everything. The government could just say, “We’re just passively recognizing the historical. . .” — the fact that, whatever, you can write it yourself. You can write the arguments yourself.

I think it’s highly likely that the government will grant this case, although they won’t necessarily agree to decide all of those questions. But I think they’re going to take the case. And some justices will press to change the law. Others will take the narrower position on the first question, that the facts have changed, but in any event, I would say prepare yourselves for seeing lots of Ten Commandments in public places as you wander the countryside in the coming years.

What the future holds

The saga that I’ve just narrated raises the question of what exactly the American public expects from the Supreme Court on these issues. It’s clear that many Americans believe that the justices ought to reflect and ratify their own understanding of how the country ought to be working.

I read USA Today every day — I read it faithfully, if I can use that word here — because it provides such an interesting window on what people are thinking. This letter to the editor appeared in USA Today earlier this month: “Our next justice should be moderate, pragmatic, open-minded, Protestant, and a member of middle America. Last time I checked we were still the majority, yet we do not have one justice.”

Another letter, also this month, was a little more pointed, noting the fact that there are three Jews and six Catholics on the court: “With the majority of the country being Protestant, the court is ominously out of balance.”



Linda takes a legal question.

It’s hard to know in the abstract what statements like these mean. As I learned from studying the history of the abortion debate for my new book, Protestantism is an awfully big tent. In the 1960s and ’70s, it included the brave ministers of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion — which in the years before *Roe* referred desperate women for illegal, but safe, abortions — and the members of the Religious Right. The latter eventually made common cause with the Catholic Church to oppose legal abortion in the years after *Roe*.

I don’t know what to make of these statements other than to interpret them as a sign of general disquiet and alienation on the part of people who have persuaded themselves that their voices are more likely to be heard by

a court whose justices, or at least some justices, pray in their church.

Again, turning to USA Today, Henry Brinton, who is a well-known liberal Presbyterian minister in the Washington area, had a really interesting op-ed earlier this month, noting that the Supreme Court had permanently closed its front doors to the public last spring. Did you all hear about this? The big ceremonial brass doors on top of the marble stairs were closed, supposedly for security reasons, and people have to enter underneath the stairs and go through a little passageway. It’s really sad.

Noting that, Reverend Brinton declared, “We worship the God of Security. Security,” he went on, “is a false God.”

I know that many, most of you, all of you, in this room believe there are many false gods, but you probably know better than I to expect the Supreme Court to agree with you.

Thank you very much.

*Linda Greenhouse, who earned a master’s degree from Yale Law School, covered the U.S. Supreme Court for the New York Times between 1978 and 2008. She received the Pulitzer Prize in Journalism (Beat Reporting) in 1998 “for her consistently illuminating coverage” of the court. Her biography of Justice Harry Blackmun, **Becoming Justice Blackmun**, was published in 2005. Her latest book is **Before Roe v. Wade: Voices That Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court’s Ruling** (with Reva B. Siegel). **Before Roe**, a 335-page hardback, is available from ffrf.org/books/ for \$29 ppd.*

In memoriam: David Randolph

The following tribute to David Randolph appeared Dec. 21 in *The Paris Review Daily* and is reprinted with the author’s permission. Randolph, a creative genius and Foundation Lifetime Member, died May 12, 2010.

Randolph was honored at a 2009 luncheon hosted by FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor in New York City for his stellar contributions to the performance of music — secular and otherwise — and for his support of the Foundation.

By Oliver Sacks

As Christmas approaches, the churches and concert halls of New York are filled with various renderings of Handel’s “Messiah.” But one “Messiah,” perhaps the most iconic of all, which filled the air last year and each year for the 45 years before it, has gone.

David Randolph conducted his St. Cecilia Chorus’ version of the “Messiah” at Carnegie Hall every year since 1965. His birthday was Dec. 21, and as he celebrated his 95th in 2009, he was as full of physical and creative energy as ever. He would bound to the podium with the spring of someone a quarter his age, take a bow and then turn to the audience, speaking in his deep, melodious baritone, to introduce the

singers, players and their instruments and the main themes of the “Messiah.”

His passion for every aspect of the music was evident. He often gave historical glosses on a particular instrument or musical theme, and he never omitted to say that Handel drew much of his most beloved “religious” music from the bawdy Italian love songs of his time. There was no such thing as “religious” music, Randolph felt, any more than there was “military” music or “love” music; there was only music put to different uses, in different contexts.

This was a point which he brought out with great eloquence in his beautiful book, *This Is Music: A Guide to the Pleasure of Listening*, and he would often mention it before a performance of his annual Christmas Oratorio or the great Passions he conducted at Easter. He would mention it, too, when conducting his favorite Requiem Masses by Brahms, Verdi or Berlioz — all of whom, he would remind the audience, were atheists (as he himself was).

The religious imagination, he felt, was a most precious part of the human spirit, but he was convinced that it did not require particular religious beliefs, or indeed any religious belief. (Jonathan Miller, in directing his wonderful “Matthew Passion” at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, often makes the same point.)

Randolph was greatly gifted verbally as well as musically, and he was a man of a most loving and generous nature, combining the gravitas and wisdom of



Oliver Sacks (left) with David Randolph at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 2009.

age with the openness and spontaneity of youth — combining, as creativity must, both experience and innocence. He died last May, leaving a void that no one can fill.

But his St. Cecilia Chorus (named for the patron saint of music) fathered by him for 45 years and, orphaned by his death, will continue to perform under other conductors. They are dedicating their 2010-11 concert season to David Randolph, a season that opens with Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio” at Carnegie Hall on Dec. 23. Some of us who knew David well can hardly bear the idea of a “Christmas Oratorio” or a “Messiah” without him, but he would never have allowed such sentimental-

ity.

Performers and conductors come and go, but the music is always there, and it is certain that the St. Cecilia Chorus will bear the stamp of nearly a half century with David Randolph for a very long time.

*Oliver Sacks, M.D., a member of FFRF’s Honorary Board, is a practicing physician and the author of 10 books, including **The Mind’s Eye, Musicophilia, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, An Anthropologist on Mars and Awakenings** (which inspired the Oscar-nominated film). He lives in New York City, where he is a professor of neurology and psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center.*

Florida mayor hostile to atheists

It started Dec. 13 at a Cape Coral City Council meeting when Atheists of Florida members were told to either cover up the message on their shirts or leave the room. The shirts depict a U.S. flag over which the words "One nation indivisible" and "Atheists of Florida" are inscribed. Shirt backs say "Atheists of Florida."

On Jan. 24, AoF President John Kieffer, who's also an FFRF member, was thrown out of the meeting by two police officers for wearing the shirt and trying to speak during the public comment part of the meeting.

It was more than the shirt, Mayor John Sullivan told the Fort Myers News-Press. "They tried to impose their will on the world. If they keep on pushing, I will push really hard to bring pastors back in here for the invocations."

The shirt flap started before the Dec. 13 meeting. AoF members attended to give input on a proposed prayer policy resolution. Councilman Marty McClain told Kieffer that religious and political shirts were barred by council policy and had to be removed or turned inside out. Kieffer responded that his attire simply identified a Florida nonprofit corporation and that he would not comply with the order.

During the mid-meeting break, Sullivan and City Manager Gary King reiterated the order. King said police

would be called if necessary to enforce the demand.

Kieffer asked to see the policy, which wasn't available. He responded that he would refuse to comply and would accept the consequences. A few minutes later, King said the shirts "should be OK." Kieffer and four other atheists then addressed the council.

Sullivan introduced the shirt issue during the discussion, reading from the resolution that "during any meeting of the City Council no person shall display any banner, placard or sign that is personal, obscene, or profane." Sullivan stated that he wanted to add "political" and "personal attire" to the rule. The resolution passed unchanged, with Sullivan casting the lone dissenting vote.

"When city officials mentioned to us that no political or religious message was permitted on our shirts, my immediate thought was that this was absurd, given their recent discussions about putting up the Ten Commandments in City Hall," said Matthew Smith, an AoF and FFRF member.

As Kieffer started to speak from the podium to the council Jan. 24, Sullivan told him his attire was inappropriate, and the police led him away. "What do you find objectionable?" Kieffer asked. "How dare you!"

Earlier, when the meeting opened, the atheists stood with the rest of the citizens to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. It apparently irked some coun-

cil members that the heathens skipped right past "under God" to "indivisible" and said it too loudly to suit the religionists. After a break in the meeting after the ejection, the council voted 6-2 to let Kieffer speak while wearing the same shirt.

"What happened this evening was somewhat unexpected. I'm appalled. I'm shocked," Kieffer told the council. He noted his military service in Vietnam. "I did it for this country. I did it for the U.S. Constitution. You may not agree with my worldview, but we're all Americans. We all have a right to our worldview. I do appreciate the council's vote to let me come back in."

One resident predicted the council members who voted to let Kieffer back in won't be reelected.

Sullivan has also publicly expressed support for displaying the Ten Commandments in City Hall, which led to a Nov. 12 letter of complaint from FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott on behalf of Cape Coral-area Foundation members.

"Our laws were built on the Ten Commandments. It's getting back to our core values," Sullivan told the News-Press.

Elliott cited case law prohibiting governmental display of the Commandments and added, "The First Commandment alone makes it obvious why the Ten Commandments may not be posted by government bodies. The government of Cape Coral has no



FFRF member EllenBeth Wachs' T-shirt design is based on one she designed for an Independence Day billboard last year. Wachs is also legal affairs coordinator and a board member for Atheists of Florida and Humanists of Florida.

business telling citizens which god they must have, how many gods they must have, or that they must have any god at all."

Sullivan got little support from the council at a later meeting in November and appears to have stopped pushing to have the Commandments in council chambers.

In Memoriam

Mackenzie Stuart, 1989–2011

FFRF member Mackenzie Taylor Stuart, 21, died Jan. 22, 2011, from injuries sustained in a car accident.

Known to her friends and family as Mac, Kenz, Kenzie or just Z, she was born July 14, 1989, in Fargo, N.D., to Carolyn and Gregory Stuart. Home-schooled through eighth grade, she graduated in 2007 from South Dearborn High School, Aurora, Ind., where she received many academic and athletic awards, including a Lilly Scholarship. She was a senior at Butler University and was a semester away from graduating with majors in computer science and mathematics. At Butler she was Math Club vice president, a Science Club member, played club soccer and volunteered at the Humane Society.

In Aurora she played youth soccer, ran cross-country and track and

lettered in track four years. She was a 10-year member of 4-H and a four-year member of South Dearborn High's academic team. Her favorite 4-H project was Cats. She won Grand Champion Cat six straight years with five different family cats.

Mackenzie was very creative. One day she might be filming magic shows with her brother, Sean. Another day she would be knitting, drawing, writing or sewing. She was an accomplished pianist and loved to sing in the Young Voices chorus. She was adept at juggling was just starting to learn the diabolo. Although a quiet and reserved person deep down, Mackenzie's off-beat sense of humor kept her family laughing.

Survivors include her parents, Gregory and Carolyn Mann Stuart of Aurora; a younger brother Sean; an older



Mackenzie Stuart with her favorite cat, Gus. Mackenzie had just gotten her braces off and was showing her new smile.

sister Madison (Ben) Eisen, Chicopee, Mass.; her grandparents, Norm and Sue Stuart, Indianapolis; and many cousins, aunts and uncles.

A memorial visitation was held Jan. 30 at the Aurora Lions Club. Memorials may be made to South Dearborn

Dollars for Scholars.

The Stuart family are household FFRF members. "Mackenzie was a second-generation atheist who was raised steeped in science and books, which fill our house," said her father. "We had such high hopes for her future."

They said what?

I also read the bible for the first time. It was deep! I liked the parts where some character was once this, but he ended up being that. Like he'd be dissing Jesus, and then he ends up being a saint. That was cool.

Rapper Lil' Wayne, on how he spent part of his time at Rikers Island jail on a weapons conviction

Rolling Stone, 1-21-11

Through it all though, well-meaning people on both sides of the ideological and partisan divide are not talking about the one thing that should be talked about: a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Erick Erickson, conservative blogger and CNN commentator, on the Arizona shooting that targeted U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords

redstate.com, 1-11-11

For the record: Rep. Giffords is Jewish, so "a saving faith in Jesus Christ" might

not be "the one thing that should be talked about."

Response by Media Matters to Erickson

mediamatters.org, 1-11-11

It never surprises me when science catches up to the bible.

Rev. Adam Stadtmiller, North Coast Calvary Chapel, Carlsbad, Calif., on a study claiming some people have a "believer's gene"

Christian Post, 1-19-11

If you're a Christian and if you're saved . . . it makes you and me brothers. . . So anybody here today who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior, I'm telling you, you're not my brother and you're not my sister, and I want to be your brother.

Newly sworn Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley, remarks at a Baptist church after his inauguration

Birmingham News, 1-18-11

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Rev. Otis Holland, Henderson, NV: Sexual assault of a minor under 14 and lewdness with a child. Holland, pastor of United Faith, is accused of molesting a girl over a period of 2 years. The small congregation meets in the lobby of Rob's Tax Service in Henderson.

The girl told police Holland had a "secret room" in his home with a video camera and that her mother dropped her off there for counseling. The girl said he threatened her with going to hell and breaking up the church if she told anyone. The girl told police Holland "snowballs the parents to get to the kids." *Source: KNTV News, 1-10-11*

Rev. Felipe DeJesus Coronel, 55, San Antonio, TX: Conspiracy to defraud the government, manufacturing counterfeit permanent resident cards and making a false statement to authorities. Coronel, pastor of Ministerios Epicentro Donde Nace La Bendición in Austin before moving to San Antonio, was indicted for selling fake "green" cards and Social Security cards. **Luis Angel Tovar, 28,** faces similar charges.

Undercover agents placed orders through Tovar for the false documents and watched secretly as he got them from Coronel, an affidavit said. *Source: San Antonio Express-News, 1-6-11*

Rev. Donald Belcher, 82, Yaak, MT: Indicted by a Maryland grand jury on child sexual abuse charges. Belcher was vicar of Church of the Holy Cross in Street, MD, from 2001-07. The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland has started the process of barring him from exercising priestly functions and determining whether pastoral care is needed for alleged victims. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 1-5-11*

Robert Klatt, 32, San Jose, CA: Lewd and lascivious conduct. Klatt, a volunteer youth minister at an unnamed San Jose church, was arrested in Las Vegas, NV. The incidents with 2 teen boys allegedly occurred from January to June 2009. Authorities are seeking information from more possible victims. *Source: Mercury News, 1-5-11*

Rev. Eric Dejaeger, 63, a Catholic priest wanted in Canada since 2002 on child sex charges, was arrested in his native Belgium for overstaying his visitor's visa. A Canadian citizen since 1994, Dejaeger served 18 months of a 5-year sentence in 1990 for assaulting Inuit children in what is now Nunavut Territory.

New allegations surfaced after he was released, and he fled the country. Officials hope to extradite him as soon as possible. *Source: BBC, 1-5-11*

Rev. Tommy Gene Daniels, 48, Rio Linda, CA: 6 felony counts of lewd and lascivious acts with a child under 14 years old and sexual conduct with a child. Daniels, head pastor at First Baptist Church who has been a foster parent and day care provider, is accused in incidents alleged to have occurred between June 2004 and June 2007. Two alleged victims have come forward.

Daniels actively worked for the passage of Prop. 8 to ban gay couples from marrying. *Source: Sacramento Bee, 12-30-10*

Rev. Sandy McGriff, 52, Grand Prairie, TX: Burglary and resisting arrest. McGriff, pastor of Church of the Living God (located in the back of her husband's furniture store) is accused of stealing more than \$10,000 worth of clothing, designer purses and electronics on Christmas Eve from the home of a church member, Serita Agnew.

McGriff told police she was in the neighborhood to pick up a peach cobbler from a friend when she saw 2 men leaving Agnew's house. When she saw a broken window, she pulled her black Jaguar in the driveway and climbed through the window. Police found items from the house in the back seat of her car after a neighbor called to report a burglary. McGriff told police she was trying to protect Agnew's property in case the men returned. The neighbor told police a different story, and the arrest affidavit said she was carrying fur coats out the back door when police arrived.

Police said she appeared to have been drinking. McGriff admitted having a criminal record, including a prostitution conviction, but said since 1988 she has "walked the straight and narrow path." *Source: Dallas Morning News, 12-28-10*

Rev. Earl Post Jr., Canton, TX: Felony stalking. Post, founder of Road to Hope Ministry, is accused of stalking a 17-year-old girl and is suspected of allowing at least one registered sex offender to volunteer when children are present.

Police arrested him for stalking while a reporter was at the ministry talking to Post, vol-

unteers and charitable donors about the sex offender allegation. *Source: KLTN News, 12-22-10*

Jonathan Hinton, 37, Venice, FL: 4 counts of child molestation on a warrant from Madison County, IN. He is contemporary worship director at Grace United Methodist Church in Venice. Hinton is alleged to have molested a girl over a period of 2 years, starting when she was 12, while he was youth pastor at Trinity Wesleyan Church in Tipton, IN.

Rev. Jay Kowalski said Hinton had been working at Grace Church for about a year and had passed a background check. The church has a policy of never leaving a child alone with a single adult, Kowalski said. *Source: Sarasota Herald-Tribune, 12-21-10*

Paula Kay Sparks, 47, Lincoln, NE: Suspicion of theft. Sparks was director at Holy Family Catholic Child Care Center, where a shortfall of \$24,411 was detected after she left the job.

Police Officer Katie Flood said Sparks allegedly erased financial records and did not deposit payments from parents. A backup of financial records at an offsite location showed the missing sum. *Source: Journal Star, 12-21-10*

John W. Elder, 61, Bremen, PA: 9 counts of theft, 12 counts of forgery and 3 counts of insurance fraud. Elder, treasurer of the Calvary United Methodist Board of Trustees and a former agent with Monumental Life Insurance, is accused of collecting premiums from victims and diverting the money to his personal accounts. Church leaders started investigating after finding overdrawn accounts. *Source: Lancaster Eagle-Gazette, 12-21-10*

Rev. Davis 'basically baited, lured him in and befriended him.'

—Alabama police Lt. Rick Morgan

Rev. Ivory McDaniels, 68, Fordyce, AR: 4 counts of 2nd-degree sexual assault. McDaniels, pastor at Greenville First Baptist Church for 16 years, is alleged to have had sexual contact with 4 teen girls as a substitute high school teacher.

A police report said, "McDaniels grabbed her by her arm, pulled her in his lap, touching her." Another girl said, "McDaniels put his arms around her legs and started rubbing her legs up and down while he talked to her."

No assaults are as yet alleged at church, but a parent told a news crew, "They say everybody is innocent until proven guilty, but I wouldn't go back to that church. That's my opinion. I wouldn't go back and I wouldn't send my kids back." *Source: KATV News, 12-20-10*

Rev. David Pomaes, 51, Bridgeport, CT: 2nd-degree breach of peace. Pomaes, pastor at La Primera Iglesias de Dios Church, his son and daughter and 3 other persons were all arrested on the same charge for "heavy fighting" outside the church on a Saturday night. Police used pepper spray to break up the fight, which stemmed from a domestic dispute. *Source: Connecticut Post, 12-20-10*

Rev. Mark Griggs, 48, Olmsted Falls, OH: 112 counts of downloading, trading and possessing child pornography. Griggs, co-pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, is among 27 adults and 3 juveniles charged in a probe called "Operation Lake Effect." Prosecutors alleged he traded child porn images from his home and church computers. *Source: WJT-TV, 12-16-10*

Baron Hoppgood, 35, Oklahoma City, OK: 4 counts of obtaining under false pretenses. The founder of Baron Hoppgood Ministries also had an outstanding warrant for defrauding an in-



keeper. It's alleged he knowingly wrote checks for \$5,467 on a closed bank account. He's also being sued by ex-employees who said their paychecks bounced. *Source: The Oklahoman, 12-16-10*

Rev. Robert Burnham, 36, Bentonville, AR: Sexual solicitation. Burnham, pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, was among 7 people arrested in a prostitution sting at a hotel.

According to his wife's Twitter account, they moved to Bentonville from Denver in November. A spokesman confirmed that the church has accepted Burnham's resignation. *Source: KSPR News, 12-10-10*

Sister Marie Thornton, 62, New Rochelle, NY: Embezzlement. Thornton, a Sisters of St. Joseph nun and chief financial officer at Iona College, is charged with embezzling \$850,000. The Catholic college, 15 miles from Manhattan, has fired her, and her religious order has restricted her activities.

Iona disclosed the theft to the IRS on its 2008 tax forms, which showed an employee stole about \$80,000 a year over 10 years by using false vendor invoices, fraudulent checks and credit card bills. The college did not reveal the theft publicly or report the crime to law enforcement. *Source: AP, 12-10-10*

Rev. Edward E. Davis, 74, Geneva, AL: 2nd-degree sodomy. David, a retired pastor, is accused of assaulting a teen boy from Florida at Davis' home and in another county.

"He just basically baited, lured him in and befriended him," said police Lt. Ricky Morgan. "He met him in a church in Holmes County." *Source: Dothan Eagle, 12-3-10*

Joshua Amoroso, 21, Colorado Springs, CO: Sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Amoroso, youth pastor at Gateway Church, is alleged to have had sex with a 14-year-old girl at least 15 times, the first time in his home while his wife was at work.

The arrest affidavit said the girl told police they had sex several times in the home of Gateway Senior Pastor Derek Sissel while Amoroso was house-sitting. Police went to Amoroso's home to verify her description of its blue walls and blue bedding she'd earlier described to a sexual assault counselor. *Source: Colorado Springs Gazette, 12-4-10*

Edwin Benjamin Rosette Sr., 57, Newport News, VA: Rape. Rosette, who listed his occupation as ordained minister and rape crisis counselor at Hampton Mental Health Associates, is accused of sexually assaulting a girl, now 19, starting when she was about 10 until she was 18. He faces a single rape count.

"Mr. Rosette had sex with her after she said, 'No I don't want to,'" the criminal complaint said.

Police suspect he may have been producing child porn. The girl noticed a video camera with a red light on at times. They confiscated several video and still cameras, 60 CDs, 80 VHS tapes, 21 floppy disks, several laptops, hard drives, thumb drives and 7 cell phones. *Source: Daily Press, 12-4-10*

Rev. Alberto Maullon, 52, Nassau Bay, TX: Public lewdness. Maullon, pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, was granted a leave of absence after his arrest in a sting at Big City Adult Bookstore. A vice officer said Maullon "whipped his junk out" in a private viewing booth with the officer present. *Source: KPRC News, 12-3-10*

Curtis Burkhardt, 43, Grand Blanc, MI: Indecent exposure by a sexually delinquent person. Burkhardt is a youth volunteer at First Baptist Church. He's accused of exposing himself to an 11-year-old girl at a campground last August while his own 5-year-old daughter sat on his lap. The girl told police he asked on the way to the campground about her 16-year-old sister's sexuality and if she'd ever seen male genitalia.

The sister then told police Burkhardt had exposed himself about 2 years ago when she was babysitting at his home. He was convicted in 2001 for exposing himself in a McDonald's

restaurant to a 3-year-old girl and her mother. *Source: Mt. Clemens Daily Tribune, 11-29-10*

Yahudah Israel, 51, Demopolis, AL: 1st-degree rape and 2nd-degree rape. Israel, pastor of an independent church, was indicted by a grand jury in a case involving a female minor. Police Chief Tommie Reese said the investigation lasted nearly a year. Bail was set at \$500,000. *Source: Demopolis Times, 11-20-10*

Pleaded / Convicted

Brian Spillane, 67, Sydney, AUS: Convicted of 9 counts of indecent assault. Spillane, who left the Catholic priesthood in 2004, faces 135 similar charges, set for 4 trials in 2011. Allegations by 44 former pupils, male and female, at St. Stanislaus College, Bathurst, detail various abusive sexual practices Spillane is accused of as far back as the 1970s. Others involve alleged incidents while Spillane was a traveling Vincentian Order priest visiting remote areas.

Two sisters, ages 8 and 10 at the time, are among his accusers. The older girl testified, "I can still taste the scotch in my mouth and I can feel the stubble of him on my face."

Spillane was refused bail after the 9 convictions. As he was led away, he called out, "Please God, help me." *Source: Sydney Morning Herald, 12-1-10*

Sentenced

Rev. Timothy Dillmuth, 34, Stowe, ME; **Richard Eland, 62, Robert Gagnon, 70,** both of Brownfield, ME: 30 days in jail, suspended, fines of \$2,000 each and probation. Dillmuth is pastor at Valley Christian Church, a storefront church in Redstone where Eland and Gagnon are elders. They were found guilty of a misdemeanor charge of failing to report they suspected a 12-year-old girl was sexually abused by another church member.

An investigator said Eland told him "God is a higher authority" than the police and they would not hesitate to act similarly in the future. *Source: WMWV News, 12-22-10*

Rev. Timothy Parker, 40, Westgate, IA: 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of 3rd-degree sexual abuse. Parker, pastor at St. Peter Lutheran Church, admitted molesting a 12-year-old female relative at the church in 2009. Prosecutors said he fondled or performed oral sex on the girl on 3 occasions. *Source: Waterloo Daily Courier, 12-21-10*

Rev. Daniel Lynch, 62, Takoma Park, MD: Pleaded guilty to creating a public disturbance and was fined \$90. Charges of illegal use of a facsimile firearm and 2nd-degree breach of peace were dropped. A Catholic priest for 40 years, Lynch was staying at his sister's in Bridgeport, CT. Police responding to a complaint of a man firing a gun at another man burst in and tackled Lynch.

Lynch's lawyer said it was all a practical joke by Lynch on an old friend and that the gun was a starter pistol used for races. *Source: Connecticut Post, 12-10-10*

Salvatore LoRusso, 68, Montauk, NY: 95 days in jail and 6 years' probation on harassment and stalking convictions in 3 separate cases. LoRusso, founder of a religious group called House of David, was sentenced in Honesdale, PA.

Some of the victims were former House of David members.

From 2005-07, LoRusso and several accomplices sent thousands of malicious faxes to businesses and institutions frequented by his daughter, her family and other victims. *Source: Wayne Independent, 12-10-10*

Vaughn Reeves, 66, Sullivan, IN: 54 years in prison for 9 counts of securities fraud. Reeves, a former pastor, and his sons used a now-defunct company, Alanar, to convince 11,000 investors to buy bonds worth \$120 million secured by mortgages on construction projects at about 150 churches. They used sales pitches that included prayers and bible passages, then diverted money from new investors to pay off previous investors, pocketing \$6 million. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 12-8-10*

Tony Walsh, 57, Dublin, IRE: 16 years in prison, with 4 suspended. The defrocked Catholic priest was convicted of serially raping 3 boys more than 20 years ago, but other investigators compiling the Murphy Report concluded he raped and molested hundreds of boys as a priest from 1978-96.

Walsh often impersonated Elvis in a song-and-dance production popular with children called the "All Priests Show." One victim, age 7 at the time, testified Walsh tied him up with cords from his vestments before raping him on the altar. He played an Elvis album to drown out the noise. He later said the boy would "burn in hell for all eternity" if he told anyone.

While appealing a 1993 attempt to defrock him, he sexually assaulted the 11-year-old grandson of the deceased in a pub restroom

after the funeral. The Vatican had overruled the verdict of the archdiocese's canonical trial and ordered him to be sent to a monastery. Not until 16 years after the first complaint did the Vatican agree to defrock him in 1996.

The Murphy Report documented how by 1985 at least 7 priests were aware of concerns about Walsh's behavior but nothing was done. The first complaint came from an 8-year-old boy's parents in 1978, 2 days after his appointment to Ballyfermot parish. Irish civil and church authorities and the Vatican failed to pursue multiple abuse allegations, the report said.

On Jan. 2, Walsh was attacked with a sharp weapon by a fellow inmate after Mass at Midlands Prison, County Laois, and needed 12 stitches to close a head wound. *Source: AP, 12-17-10; Irish Independent, 1-4-11*

Ramon Moreno, 20, Boca Raton, FL: 3 years in prison and 5 years' probation after pleading guilty to 9 counts of possession of child pornography. Moreno told police he was a youth leader at Frontline Christian Center, but a pastor there said Moreno was merely a church member who often volunteered and was never in a leadership position.

The arrest report said Moreno had images of children having sex with adults. *Source: Sun Sentinel, 12-3-10*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Diocese of New Ulm, MN**, is being sued by a Nevada man who claims he was sexually abused as an 8-year-old by **Rev. Francis Markey**, a Catholic priest recently extradited from Indiana to Ireland on charges he sexually abused a boy there in 1968.

The suit alleges Markey abused the plaintiff in 1982 at St. Andrew's Parish in Granite Falls. The suit also names treatment facilities in Ireland and New Mexico as defendants and the Irish **Diocese of Clogher**. *Source: KSTP News, 1-11-11*

The **Diocese of Worcester, MA**, and defrocked priest **Ronald Provost** are defendants in a suit filed by a Worcester County man in his late 30s who alleges Provost sexually assaulted him during the priest's tenure at Holy Angels Church in Upton between 1979-82.

Provost was convicted in 1993 of soliciting a child to pose in a state of sexual nudity, said Carmen Durso, the Worcester County victim's lawyer.

During the 1993 investigation, Provost showed police at least 100 nude photos of boys, but the diocese didn't try to determine victims' identities, Durso said.

Durso said according to a study he conducted, victims on average were 46 years old before they reported abuse. "Males in particular suppress this because of all the shame that's involved with another male having sexual contact with them." *Source: Milford Daily News, 1-9-11*

The Catholic **Knights of Columbus** organization is being sued separately for \$5 million by 2 men from Texas and Kansas who allege that **Juan "Julian" Rivera**, a former leader of the Columbian Squires in Brownsville, TX, sexually abused them in the 1970s and 1980s. The Squires is a Knights-sponsored group for males ages 10-18. The suits were filed in New Haven, CT, the Knights' national headquarters.

Kansan Jim Dennany, 49, alleges Rivera sexually abused him in 1973-77, plying him with alcohol and pornography. Hector Stone, 42, Brownsville, made similar allegations, and alleges Rivera told him if he said anything he'd cut off a body part and send it to Stone's mother.

"I was going to take this to my grave. Julian Rivera sexually abused me for 6 years from the ages of 12 to 18 years old," Stone said, with his lawyer by his side.

Rivera also "shared" the boy with another adult leader of the Squires in another city, the lawsuit states.

Stone said he reported the abuse to the Knights in 1986, who supposedly concealed his claim and intimidated him into not making it public. The Knights claim no knowledge of the allegations until December 2009.

Rivera ended his affiliation with the Brownsville Knights in January 2010. *Source: Washington Post, 12-14-10; KGBT News, 12-15-10*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

St. Dennis Catholic Parish, Galena, MD, reached a \$1.7 million settlement with Joseph Curry, 40, Smyrna, DE, who alleged that he was molested starting in 1981 by the late **Rev. Edward Carley**. The parish agreed to also issue a public apology and acknowledge that Carley molested Curry while he was learning to be an altar boy. The suit said the abuse continued until 1986.

The parish is part of the **Diocese of Wilmington, DE**, which named Carley in 2005 as an abuser of children. He died in 1998. Curry also sued the diocese, but that part of the suit was delayed when the diocese declared bankruptcy. *Source: AP, 1-5-11*

Finances

The **Archdiocese of Milwaukee** has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy due to past, current and pending sexual abuse suits. The archdiocese has paid \$29 million to settle about 200 claims. Suits are pending that accuse 6 more priests, including a case with about 200 alleged

The sisters promptly ended their relationships with Rev. Carrino once they learned he was having affairs with both of them.

victims at a school for the deaf. The petition lists \$50 million in debts, not including payments related to upcoming lawsuits.

The archdiocese, with assets of \$98.4 million, is the 8th to seek bankruptcy since 2002. Others are Davenport, Iowa; Fairbanks, Alaska; Portland, Ore.; San Diego; Spokane, Wash.; Tucson, Ariz.; and Wilmington, Del.

Attorney Jeff Anderson said he thought the filing was an attempt to delay the plaintiffs' deposition of former Bishop Richard Skiba. Church officials elsewhere have filed on the eve of trials of major depositions to avoid making information public, he said.

Chapter 11 reorganization means normal activities can be continued, said spokesman Jerry Topczewski. "People should know this doesn't mean we're going out of business." *Source: AP, 1-4-11*

Legal Developments

A New York state appeals court dismissed a suit against **Rev. Lawrence Carrino** and Grace Gospel Church of Suffolk for breach of fiduciary duty and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Carrino was conducting love affairs with Valerie Spielman and Cindy Gallo, who are sisters. Once they found out, they both ended the relationship.

The sisters did not prove Carrino had "control and dominance" over them, the court said. "Although both sisters allege facts which they contend made them uniquely vulnerable and incapable of self-protection, that contention is belied by the acknowledgement in the complaint that they both promptly ended their relationships with Carrino once they learned he was having affairs with both of them." *Source: Courthouse News, 12-9-10*

Allegations

Rabbi Gershon Kranczer, 58, Brooklyn, NY: Kranczer, who resigned in September as executive director and principal at Yeshiva Tehila L'Dovid, a school for boys with learning disabilities in Midwood, is suspected of engaging in a long-term sexual relationship with at least one of his daughters.

His son, **Asher Kranczer, 21**, and the rabbi are believed to have fled to Israel. Another son, **Yechezkel Kranczer, 24**, turned himself in and faces 70 counts of sexual abuse and 2 counts of endangering the welfare of a child. Another son, age 15, is charged with sexual abuse of his 8-year-old sister.

The rabbi and his wife have 14 children, ranging in age from 8 to 28, police said. The children under 18 have been removed from the home. The allegations surfaced when a 20-year-old daughter working as a teacher's aide told a staff member she had been raped by her father repeatedly for 15 years. The alleged female victims are now 20, 19, 17 and 8. *Source: Wall Street Journal, 12-4-10*

Resigned / Removed

Rev. David Tolliver, Jefferson City, MO: Tolliver, executive director of the Missouri Baptist Convention, resigned "due to immoral behavior with a woman," according to a statement from the 600,000-member organization with about 2,000 Southern Baptist churches.

"It is disheartening to learn of any fellow believer succumbing to sinful choices," said Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's executive committee.

Tolliver was a pastor for 20 years before becoming a church executive. *Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1-10-11*

Rev. Marshall Brown, 57, Fairfax City, VA: Brown, associate rector at Truro Church, was fired for accessing "websites that would be considered pornography," said Truro Executive Director Warren Thrasher. Truro is one of the largest conservative U.S. Anglican churches.

Truro was one of 14 Virginia parishes to break away from the Episcopal Church after the 2003 election of the denomination's first openly gay bishop.

Brown was treated in 2005 for an Internet addiction after he reported having a problem, said Bishop Martyn Minns, adding that back then he didn't ask Brown about the details of his addiction. He said he was told by counselors that "there was nothing illegal or involving children," but beyond that, Minns said, "I didn't ask too many questions." *Source: Washington Post, 1-8-11*

Bishop Ronald Gilmore, 68, decided it was time to get out of Dodge — the Diocese of Dodge City, KS, that is. In his resignation statement on the diocesan website, Gilmore

said, "Sometimes, being a bishop feels like a blessing. Sometimes, being a bishop feels like a cursing. For me, being a bishop has always felt like a burden." He'd been bishop since 1998.

Barbara Dorris, outreach coordinator for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, called the diocese "one of the most secretive dioceses in the U.S. regarding child sex crimes." *Source: AP, 12-15-10*

Rev. William R. Gould, 71, Post Falls, ID: Diocese of Boise Bishop Michael Driscoll stripped Gould of all ministerial duties due to allegations he had sexually inappropriate conduct with a male under 18 in Idaho Falls 29 years ago. Gould was put on administrative leave in 2005 after an investigation substantiated claims he engaged in sexual misconduct with an adult. *Source: AP, 12-13-10*

Rev. Dennis Shaw, Auburn, NY: Removed as pastor at Holy Family Catholic Church by the Diocese of Rochester for allegedly sexually abusing a child in the late 1970s. Shaw, ordained in 1972, was placed on administrative leave. No further details about the allegations were given. *Source: Auburn Citizen, 12-13-10*

Rev. Edmund Penisten, Sitka, AK: Penisten, pastor of St. Gregory Catholic Church in Sitka, resigned and left Alaska for evaluation at an undisclosed location after being suspended from the public ministry by Diocese of Juneau Bishop Edward Burns.

"A computer program that had been installed on the computers at St. Gregory's indicated that some questionable material had been accessed," said Rev. Pat Travers, diocesan vicar general. A software program alerted the diocese that pornographic websites had been accessed. *Source: KFSK News, 12-10-10*

Walter D. Salisbury, 79, Bar Harbor, ME: Salisbury, a former Catholic Josephite priest, resigned from the Bar Harbor Housing Authority board after being told his criminal past was being investigated. He was convicted in 1979 in Texas for committing indecency with a child and in 1993 for committing an indecent act on a minor in a church rectory in Washington, D.C.

Brian Tucker, a Baltimore lawyer representing the Josephite Society, said Salisbury has been barred from representing himself as a priest since 1993. Salisbury was listed as "Father W. Dayton Salisbury" on the Housing authority website.

"I called the town and told them to take ["father"] off of there," Tucker said before Salisbury's resignation. "He is not to hold himself out as a priest." *Source: Bangor Daily News, 12-3-10*

Other

George Neville Rucker, 90, Los Angeles, CA: The Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests objected to Rucker, a defrocked priest accused of sexually molesting 38 girls but never prosecuted due to the statute of limitations, being allowed on a 3-month, \$12,000 cruise to South America.

David Clohessy, SNAP executive director, likened it to Voyages of Discovery saying, "Welcome aboard criminals. Just make sure your coat tails are tucked in and say please and thank you."

Rucker was charged with molesting 12 girls in 2002 and was arrested by Alaska state troopers on a cruise ship bound for Russia. Charges were dropped in 2003 after a U.S. Supreme Court struck down California's attempt to prosecute older molestation cases.

Clohessy also criticized the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for not keeping tabs on Rucker after his defrocking. "Rucker really is one of the very worst, and for church officials to claim that they are monitoring them, watching them like a hawk, is ridiculous."

Rucker was officially accused of 38 molestations occurring between 1947-80. He retired in 1987. The archdiocese paid millions of dollars starting in 2006 to settle civil suits against Rucker and other priests. *Source: Miami New Times, 1-4-11*

The Catholic **Diocese of Green Bay, WI**, denies allegations by the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests that the diocese is still covering up sexual abuse by priests. SNAP asked for a court order to stop the diocese from destroying personnel records and asked federal prosecutors to investigate whether former Bishop David Zubik, now of Pittsburgh, and other officials obstructed investigations.

"It's an intentional, deliberate act of destroying what's in the file," said Peter Isely, Midwest director of SNAP. "This is a potential record of crimes committed against us, and criminal evidence, and it's evidence of potential fraud, which is the concealment or transference of clerics" guilty of sexual abuse.

Deacon Tim Reilly, diocesan director of administration, denied the allegations. He said the diocese's new records management policy calls for destruction of personnel records only in the cases of priests who have been dead for a year or more, and in no case are the records destroyed if they concern pending court cases.

SNAP based its accusations on recent court testimony given by Rev. James Doerfler. The group quoted Doerfler as saying Zubik issued orders in 2007 to destroy records pertaining to pedophile priests. *Source: Green Bay Press-*

Creep of The Month



A defrocked Irish priest once called "the Hannibal Lecter of the clerical world" by a plaintiff's lawyer was arrested in Dublin for possession of child pornography. **Oliver O'Grady, 65**, had images and videos on a USB key, external hard drive and a laptop, said Detective Johanna Doyle. "We are talking about thousands upon thousands of images of child pornography — children from the age of 2 and 3 up to teenage boys and girls." He'd left the laptop on a plane.

Bail was set at €500 for O'Grady, the subject of the 2006 documentary "Deliver us From Evil," detailing the years (1971-93) he served parishes in the Diocese of Stockton, CA. The diocese and insurers have since paid \$21 million to about 2 dozen male and female victims, most recently a \$2 million payment last June to a brother and sister now in their 30s. "He was taking them out of the classroom at the school and sexually assaulting them," said the siblings' lawyer Anthony Demarco.

O'Grady admitted sleeping with 2 women to get access to their children. He served 7 years in prison after pleading guilty to 4 counts of sexual abuse with children under age 14 and was deported to Ireland in 2001.

In a 2005 civil suit deposition, he was asked what his "type" was: "Generally, a boy who was spontaneous, affectionate, playful, generally around the age of 10, 11, and who seemed to maybe need somebody to care for him. I'm not saying that he necessarily had family problems but seemed to identify with me as somebody who he could trust, who he could come to, who was willing to take care of him."

"We don't blame Oliver," said attorney Patrick Wall. "He can't control himself. [We blame] the people who were supposed to supervise him."

He admitted to superiors in 1976 he was a pedophile.

There was a public outcry last June when it was revealed the diocese bought a \$94,560 annuity for O'Grady that started paying him \$788 a month for 10 years when he turned 65. Bishop Stephen Blaire said he arranged it while O'Grady was in prison to ensure he'd leave the priesthood and not fight the potentially lengthy defrocking process. *Source: Lodi News-Sentinel, 12-13-10; Irish Central, 12-14-10; Stockton Record, 12-16-10*

Gazette, 12-22-10

The Catholic **Diocese of Stockton, CA**, paid \$300,000 on Sept. 22 to settle a sexual abuse claim against **Rev. Leo Suarez**. Half that amount will come from insurance. Suarez was defrocked in Jan. 2010 after admitting he'd molested a minor 20 years ago at St. Anthony's Parish in Hughson.

No lawsuit has been filed against the diocese or Suarez. A spokeswoman said the diocese doesn't know his whereabouts. *Source: Sacramento Bee, 12-17-10*

Leaders of the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** in Boise, ID, won't be charged with failure to report child molestation by a church member due to Idaho's clergy privilege law.

Stephen R. Young, 59, Eagle, a longtime Boise policeman and school resource officer, was sentenced to 25 years prison in September after pleading guilty to molesting a child who was between 12 and 18 months old in 2006. Other charges, which named 4 victims between the ages of 1 month and 21 months, were dropped. Prosecutors said Young may have had as many as 20 victims.

He confessed to his wife in August 2009 and moved to an apartment. He confessed to his bishop in January 2010. That confession was part of the LDS disciplinary process which resulted in his excommunication. But not till a fellow police officer who attended Young's church heard of the punishment and spoke to him was Young arrested in March, 2 days after his abrupt retirement.

According to church attorney Randy Austin, as soon as Young confessed to church officials, they urged him and his wife to tell the authorities. Making that recommendation was all clergy members could legally do until Young turned himself in, Austin said. Violating the clergy privilege could have jeopardized the prosecution, he said.

An underage girl in a similar case told the Idaho Statesman that before her molester pleaded guilty in 2008 (the abuse was reported in 1999), she was forced to meet with him and a bishop. "At that point, I was really scared. My family was about to be torn apart. They wanted me to forgive him. I was 14. I was put on the spot. What are you going to say?" *Source: Idaho Statesman, 12-13-10*

blackcollar@ffrf.org



Sharing the Crank Mail

A sampling, printed as received, of FFRF's recent fan mail:

Praying for dan & Laurie

Obviously you have been deceived by Satan himself. I pray daily that God will deliver you from Satan's snare and save you from your sins! YOU CANNOT control my praying nor the 1000's I will get praying for your salvation!!! — *Dave Qualls*

Mississippi

You are free to visit us here in Mississippi. However, leave your liberal, anti-God ideas at home. In case you didn't know it, the name of your outfit is a bastardization of the true constitutional statement of 'freedom of religion'. Thank You, and BUTT OUT! — *Lowell McAfee*

GOD

IF IT WERE NOT FOR JESUS CHRIST THER WOULD BE NO CHRISTMAS, DUMB ASS . I HAVE SEEN THE POWER OF CHRIST FIRST HAND AND SOME DAY YOU WILL TOO. I HOPE I AM THERE TO SEE IT. — *ROBERT DE GREGORIO*

Discrimination

No one is making you believe in GOD-Dog which ever way you want to say it. You might have sold your soul to the devil but its not to late. Why was we put on earth...maybe to see who will stand by GOD. Please don't think I trying to be mean. I'll be praying for your group! — *Joy Believe, 316, John Faith, WI*

FAGS

WHEN YOU GO TO CHURCH TODAY< PLEASE PRAY FOR ALL THE MILITARY PEOPLE THAT HAAVE TO SERVE WITH

THE FAGS> IF A FAG GETS WOUNDED IN COMBAT,THEIR AIDS INFECTED BODY SHOULD BE LEFT WHERE THEY ARE INJURED. — *Stephanie Miller*

300 characters?

Why don't you give me enough room to voice my opinion, are you afraid of what I might say? 300 characters is like giving crabs to a prostitute not enough punishment. See you on facebook. — *Jerry Jones*

To staff attorney

If you and you organization feel threatened by our praying in Yakima to the Creator of all there is please use your God given right by this great country to be free to leave and go to a country that does not believe in God. Merry CHRIST-mas. — *David Pankey*

I will fight this group to the end!

You know China is free from freedom of religion...MOVE THERE! I have God on my side! One Nation Under God We Stand! God doesn't make you love and obay him its your free will. Alfa and Omega always has been always will be. — *Grace Faith, Heaven, WI*

Brookville, IN

Leave the Nativity Scenes alone and mind your own HELLbound business. People around here have FAITH. Something will only understand after you face your maker. Your parents have failed you and your supporters will burn in hell with you. — *John Doe*

Nativity

Here in Oregon we want you to stay out of our bussniss. This aint your state. — *priestessofhell@stupid.com*

hi

BUTT OUT!!! GO TO ANOTHER COUNTRY AND LIVE!!! GO BACK TO THE STATE OF WISCONSIN AND LIVE THERE!!! WE DON'T WANT YOU HERE!!! GO AWAY!!! IF I WANT TO STAND ON A STREET CORNDER AND RECITE BIBLE VERSES I WILL AND YOU CAN'T STOP ME. FREEDOM OF SPEACH!!! YOU BUNCH BUBBLE HEADS. GROW UP!! — *Lynnett Lonaker*

Dear Hitler,

I realize you're trying to turn America into Nazi Germany. It's a sad day when one cry baby complains that a nativity scene hurts his po wittle feelings...and asks him big bwuver (you) to help him get the scene taken down. For every turd out there that complains about Christmas being "religion shoved down" their throat, Im gonna act out tend fold the opposite way! Thank you for igniting this powder keg. You think your sorry ass group is vocal? Eh...you guys are nothing but ants. Merry Christmas, mother fuckers! — *Hue G. Rekshun*

what is your problem

You have no business to try to get rid of the nativity scene in Wabash, IN. FFRF is going to hell — *Anonymous*

"Freethinkers"

I will be praying for you sick sick people. God loves you no matter what, and remember their are no "Freethinkers" as you call them in Hell. They all believe in God now! — *jesuslovesyou@heaven.com*

f u

Screw you guys. You're gonna burn. Matt. 25:41 — *Jesus Christ*

Oh NO!

You up-tight fools got your panties in a bunch over prayers. Who's to say that your views aren't so called "myths". Perhaps you liberal bitches should be the ones who should shut the fuck up and stop sticking your noses in other peoples business. Get your shit outve our business. — *We Are Anonymous, We Do Not Forgive*

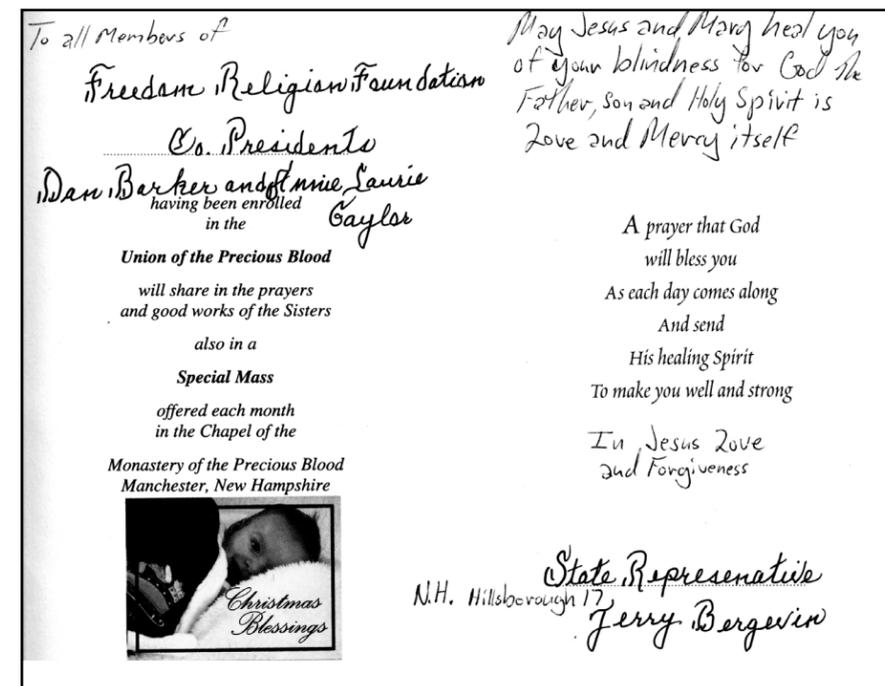
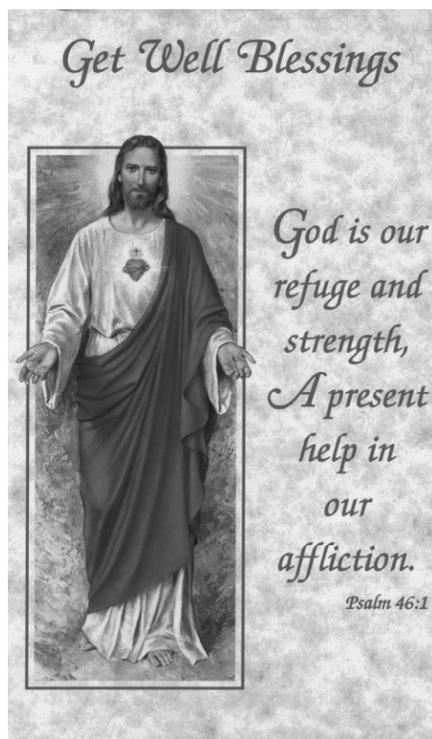
MAY GOD HAVE MURCY ON YOUR SOUL

You seam to be self center people, just like the science community. You take the liberties that our four fathers fought for. Your promotting anrchy against the very foundation that has protected you'll. I could go as far as to call all of you hypocrites and communist. In the BIBLE. Revulation it speaks of people looking to themselves and growing more wicked as generation pass. Seeing communities as yourselves has shown TRUTH of profficies spoken in the BIBLE. You are being fulfilled. A magin that, a book written 3000 year ago. — *curtis perry*

Giles County Schools

You folks are allowing Satin to rule you!!! Shame on you, I hold your organization responsible! I am praying that you will be strong enough to run Satin out of your life, because we will fight for Jesus in Giles County. You might win the battle, but I promise you, without Jesus you WILL NOT win the war! Following Satin is such an easy out — following Jesus is the challenge and thus makes us Christians stronger. — *Toma Eaton*

They simply can't stop sharing!



card made in China: "Heavenly Father GOD, I come before in submitting my life to you. I have made a complete mess of my life and only YOU can make it better. Please forgive me and come into my heart."

- A WallBuilders card (made in China) from R.W. with U.S. flags and Latin crosses and an In God We Trust bookmark with religious quotes from the nation's founders.

- A Holy Night card with a National Rifle Association imprint: "ATTN R. Dawkins. I pray you turn your back on Satan and return to the Light." (Everett, Wash.)

- "Your members probably experience difficulties in our society because of your views. Just letting you know that God loves you and so do we!" (Sheldon, Iowa)

The Foundation received its usual quota of religious Christmas cards in December, the general tone of which was more civil than the Crank Mail. A sampling:

- An envelope from the Howards in Texas had "Happy Birthday Jesus" stamped in red above and below our address and on the flap in back.

- One addressed "To Dan" from Rogersville, Tenn., proclaimed "Eternity is too long to be wrong! Praying for you buddy."

- The whole of the Rogersville Baptist Temple may have signed a card in which was enclosed a Chick Publications anti-evolution tract. In it, a Christian student's biblical truth wins out over his professor's scientific "facts," so much so that the teacher goes imme-

New Hampshire state Rep. Jerry Bergevin, R-Manchester, who sent the card above, left and center, is primary sponsor of a bill that says "an unborn child shall be included in the definition of 'another' for the purpose of first- and second-degree murder, manslaughter and negligent homicide." At a 2009 health care town hall, the Concord Monitor reported, Bergevin wore a shirt that said "The Democratic Party is a cult of evil." He asked [now former] U.S. Rep. Carol Shea-Porter how she could be a Catholic and support "abortion and euthanasia, which is in the Obama death care fascist program. Will you please repent of this mortal sin before it condemns your immortal soul?"

diately after class to the administration building to resign: "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I can no longer teach evolution. It can't possibly be true." (Notice that there are no gentlewomen accepting his resignation.)

- From West Bend, Wis., came a card to "Anne Gaylord," noting she'll be remembered in daily Masses for one full year by (this is a mouthful)

the Discalced Carmelite Community at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians, at Holy Hill. (Discalced means "unshod or wearing sandals.")

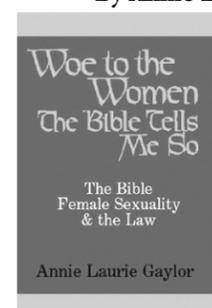
- "Thank you for your support — Mary, Joseph and Son Jesus" (Seattle).

- "A Christian and PROUD of it!" (Milwaukee)

- J.C., Beaumont, Texas, wrote on a

Woe to the Women The Bible Tells Me So

By Annie Laurie Gaylor



Delightfully illustrated by Alma Cuebas, it contains a valuable compendium of more than 200 sexist verses. An essential guide for the reader who is too busy (or too non-masochistic) to study the bible.

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We are pleased to present the second installment of “One Nation Under God: A Bible History,” written and illustrated by Mike Konopacki. It was part of the coursework for his master of fine arts degree in 2010 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was also presented at FFRF’s convention in October.

Massachusetts Bay Colony

Inspired by Columbus, Pope Alexander VI declared on May 4, 1493, that, “The Catholic faith and Catholic religion be everywhere increased and spread”, and that “barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself.” This doctrine of “Christian Discovery” was later adopted by Protestant colonizers.

The Pilgrims, a Separatist sect from the Church of England fled to Massachusetts Bay in 1620 aboard the *Mayflower*. The *Mayflower Compact*, considered the first document of self-government in North America, stated their purpose, “Having undertaken, for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the First Colony in the Northern Parts of Virginia.”

Later, another group of English religious dissidents, called Puritans, landed in Massachusetts Bay. They also wanted to bring Christianity to the heathens. The Great Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company, which funded the Puritan venture, depicts an Indian with a scroll coming from his mouth that reads “Come Over and Help Us.” But the “heathens” in this territory were the Pequot people and they didn’t want help. The governor of the colony, John Winthrop, justified the taking of Pequot land by claiming it a legal “vacuum.” If the Indians resisted, the Puritans looked to **Romans 13:2**: “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”

Damnation took the form of the Pequot War. Employing tactics we would now call terrorism, the English settlers attacked non-combatants and burned villages. Those that escaped the flames were slain. As Puritan theologian Cotton Mather said, “It was supposed that no less than 600 Pequot souls were brought down to Hell that day.”

Indian Removal

White expansion into Indian land increased with the birth of the United States. The **Indian Intercourse Act of 1790** was designed to acquire land through treaties. But white settlers often violated treaty boundaries. When the Indians resisted, U.S. military force was used to protect the settlers.



Photo: Brent Nicastro

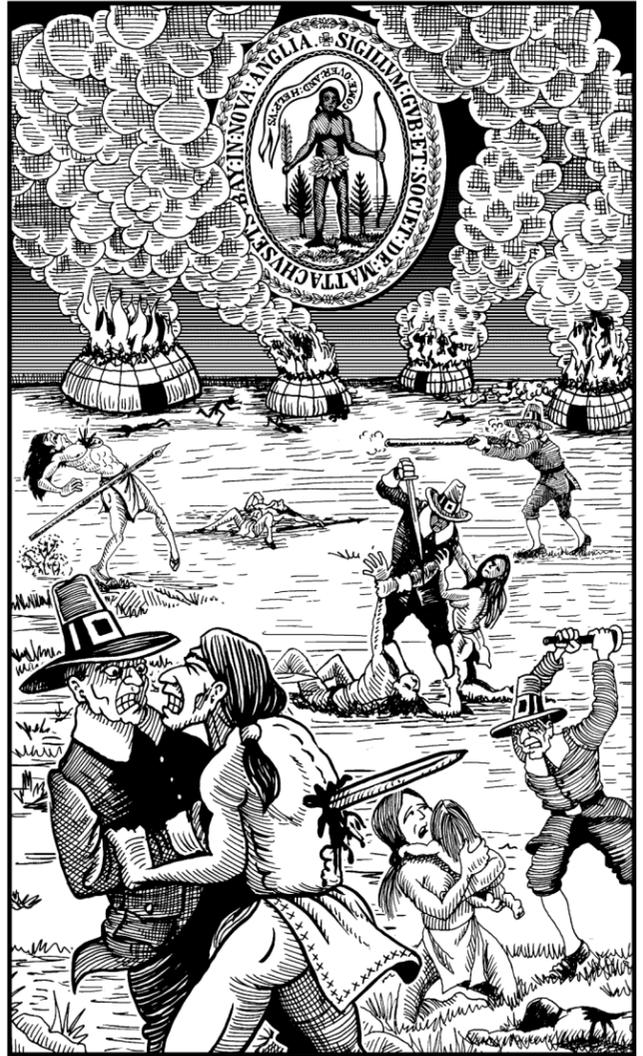
President Thomas Jefferson sought conciliation. He believed in peaceful coexistence and acculturation. Ironically, the non-religious president supported efforts to Christianize Indians in hopes that they would be assimilated into white culture and not displaced. Some tribes sought coexistence, but others chose armed resistance. Andrew Jackson chose a more ruthless policy than Jefferson. Jackson became famous for killing Indians in battle. Between 1814 and 1824, Jackson also played a major role in a series of treaties with the southern Indians that ceded millions of acres to land-hungry whites.

Jackson was elected president in 1828. In 1830, Congress passed the **Indian Removal Act** to relocate the remaining Indians to west of the Mississippi River. The Cherokee sued in the Supreme Court but lost. In 1891, former Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story explained why, “As infidels, heathens and savages, they (the Indians) were not allowed to possess the prerogatives belonging to absolute, sovereign and independent nations. The territory over which they wandered and which they used for their temporary fugitive purposes, was in respect to Christians deemed as if it were inhabited only by brute animals.”

Most of the southern Indians were forcibly removed by the time Jackson’s presidency ended in 1837. In 1838 the last group of Indians, 16,000 Cherokees, were forced to march to Oklahoma in the **Trail of Tears**. Four thousand died along the way. Land was now available for the planting of cotton and the spread of slavery.

Romans 13:2

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.



Psalms 2:8

Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.





In the News

Illinois gov signs civil union bill

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn signed a civil union bill for same-sex and opposite-sex couples into law Jan. 31. It goes into effect June 1.

"It's an important moment in the land of Lincoln," Quinn said. "We believe in civil rights and we believe in civil unions."

Five states and the District of Columbia allow same-sex marriage. New Jersey grants civil unions similar to Illinois. Several other states, cities and counties grant domestic partnerships with varying legal rights.

Faith-healing death brings probation

Herbert and Catherine Schaible, who belong to First Century Gospel Church in Philadelphia, were sentenced Feb. 2 to 10 years' probation after being convicted of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment last year for the death of their 2-year-old son, Kent. He died from pneumonia after his parents prayed for him but never sought medical attention.

The couple also must seek routine and emergency care for their remaining seven children, ages 1 through 15.

"We are grieving and will always feel the loss of our son," Herbert Schaible told the judge, pleading for leniency so he could continue to support the family by teaching school at the church. "With God's help, this will never happen again."

Is it something in the (holy) water?

A commentary in the journal *Science* on Jan. 28 by Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer of Pennsylvania State University had some discouraging news.

The researchers surveyed 926 U.S. high school teachers about how they taught evolution and found that 13% of respondents advocated biblical creationism or "intelligent design" creationism in biology class.

Only 28% "unabashedly introduce evidence that evolution has occurred and craft lesson plans so that evolution is a theme that unifies disparate topics in biology," according to the report titled "Defeating Creationism in the Courtroom, But Not in the Classroom." Most biology teachers belong to the "cautious 60%," who are "neither strong advocates for evolutionary biology nor explicit endorsers of non-scientific alternatives," the study said.

"I think the real amount of under-teaching of evolution is likely even worse," science literacy expert Jon Miller of Michigan State University told USA Today. He published a 2007 report in *Science* ranking the U.S. 34th out of 35 developed nations (ahead of only Turkey) on public acceptance of evolution. Nearly a third of U.S. respondents said evolution was "absolutely false" in that study. "Not many teachers have the backbone to stand up to parents and school boards for evolution," Miller said.

According to a Gallup Poll of 1,019 U.S. adults surveyed in December, 40% of respondents believe God created humans in their present form about 10,000 years ago. Another 38% believe God guided a process by which humans

developed over millions of years from less advanced life forms, while 16% believe humans developed over millions of years without God's involvement.

The "secular evolution" view has risen from 9% in 1982 to 16% now.

Gallup surveyed U.S. adults Jan. 7-9 and found 29% said religion should have more influence and 29% said it should have less influence. Another 39% said organized religion's influence is just right. The question didn't specify what was meant by more or less influence.

Creationist teacher gets Ohio heave-ho

The Mount Vernon [Ohio] City Schools Board of Education voted 4-1 on Jan. 10 to fire John Freshwater, a middle school teacher accused of inappropriate religious activity in the classroom — including displaying posters with the Ten Commandments and bible verses, branding crosses on students' arms with an electrical device, espousing creationism and deploring homosexuality.

A local family sued Freshwater and the district in 2008 and received substantial settlements. Sporadically for the next two years, administrative hearings were held to determine if he should be fired. R. Lee Shepherd, the referee presiding over the hearings, recommended there was just cause for termination. District costs, mostly for legal counsel, are estimated at \$902,000.

Freshwater tried "to make eighth-grade science what he thought it should be — an examination of accepted scientific curriculum with the discerning eye of Christian doctrine," Shepherd said. "[He] used his classroom as a means of sowing the seeds of doubt and confusion in the minds of impressionable students as they searched for meaning in the subject of science." Freshwater could appeal the decision.

Bible-chewing 'devil dog' found dead

Miriam Smith, 65, was charged Jan. 23 with felony animal cruelty in Columbia, S.C., for allegedly hanging her nephew's pit bull with an electric cord and burning its body. Smith told police that the female dog named Diamond was a "devil dog" that had chewed up her bible. She said she feared Diamond would hurt neighborhood children. Police said the year-old dog was kept outside on a chain and chewed a bible that was on Smith's porch. The dog's remains were found under a pile of dried lawn clippings, with a smell of kerosene still in the air.

Humanist group frees accused Malawi 'witches'

A humanist group in Malawi paid fines to secure the release of three elderly women sent to prison after being accused of witchcraft.

"We paid fines of \$33 for each of the convicts. We are very very happy, although the fight is on to seek the release of 50 others," George Thindwa, executive director of the Association of Secular Humanism, told *Agence France-Presse* on Jan. 11.

The women, ages 80, 72 and 62, were convicted in December after neighbors turned them in. They were



sentenced to one year in prison because they could not pay the \$33 fine. Half the population of 13 million live on less than a dollar a day.

The case highlighted concerns over rights violations in Malawi based on allegations of witchcraft. Belief in witchcraft and traditional medicine runs deep in this former British colony, largely dominated by Christians. Thindwa, an economist by profession, said ASH has launched a nationwide campaign to fight for the rights of senior citizens, especially women.

Bishop pulls Catholic off Phoenix hospital

Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix announced Dec. 21 that St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix can no longer identify itself as Catholic because it ended a woman's pregnancy in 2009 to save her life.

Olmsted earlier excommunicated Sister Margaret McBride, a member of the hospital's ethics committee, for allowing the therapeutic abortion.

In a statement, the hospital refused to agree to Olmsted's demand to never again perform an abortion. "Morally, ethically, and legally, we simply cannot stand by and let someone die whose life we might be able to save."

Muslims sue Spanish teacher for ham mention

A high school teacher in southern Spain has been sued for child abuse by a Muslim student's parents who claim the geography teacher "defamed Islam" by talking about Spanish ham.

The incident occurred at the Instituto Menéndez Tolosa in La Línea de la Concepción. José Reyes Fernández was lecturing about Spain's different climates and said Andalusia has the perfect temperature for curing *Jamón Ibérico*, a world-famous delicacy.

The Muslim student interrupted Reyes and, according to local newspaper reports, complained that mentioning pork was offensive to his religion. The suit alleges "abuse with xenophobic motivations." A section of the Spanish penal code makes it a crime to "offend the feelings of the members of a religious confession." Spain has about 1.5 million Muslims, compared to about 100,000 in 1990.

Swiss will ban many foreign missionaries

Switzerland will ban from its nation all missionaries from non-European Union countries starting in 2012.

A recent decision by a Swiss court has established that missionary work is "gainful employment" and thus subject to employment quotas. The law restricts missionaries from all religious

denominations.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is officially not happy: "The church has a long history in Switzerland dating back to 1850. We hope a solution can be found that allows missionaries, regardless of their country of origin, to continue to serve the Swiss people."

Ugandan gay activist beaten to death

One arrest has been made in the Jan. 26 beating death of David Kato, 46, a Ugandan gay rights campaigner who had sued a newspaper which outed him as homosexual, BBC News reported Jan. 27.

Uganda's *Rolling Stone* newspaper published photos of several people it said were gay, including Kato, with the headline "Hang them."

Though one suspect is under arrest, another one, who police say lived with Kato, is still at large.

Homosexual acts are illegal in Uganda, and Christian evangelicals there and in the U.S. have preached against it as an abomination worthy of death.

'Obama Prayer' gets officer suspended

A Manatee County corrections officer in Bradenton, Fla., was suspended in January without pay for 25.8 hours for a perceived threat against President Obama involving an intercessory prayer and bible verse. Sgt. Matthew Neu circled Psalm 109:8 ("Let his days be few, and let another take his office") with a pink highlighter in a bible and left it on another officer's desk in September with a handwritten note that said "Obama Prayer." The female officer reported it after she read the next verse, "May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow." No threat was intended, said Neu, admitting he didn't like Obama and got the bible from a stack for use by inmates.

Millions of Filipinos honor Black Nazarene

More than 2 million Filipino Catholics paraded in Manila on Jan. 9 to honor a centuries-old statue of Jesus called the Black Nazarene. Nearly 600 were treated for injuries in the crush trying to touch the icon, which is believed to have mystical powers.

The wooden statue is believed to have been brought from Mexico to Manila in 1606 by Spanish missionaries. The ship that carried it caught fire, but the statue survived and was named the Black Nazarene.

Clemente Ignacio, rector of the basilica in Quiapo, was overwhelmed by the turnout. "It means that the Catholic population is growing, and the people's faith is also growing."

STATE CHURCH *State/Church Bulletin*

Appeals court nixes Mount Soledad cross

The 43-foot-tall Latin cross on public land on Mount Soledad in San Diego is an unconstitutional "government endorsement of religion," the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled Jan. 4, the latest decision in a case that goes back to 1989. The unanimous three-judge appeals court sent the case back to a district court to determine if the religious cross can by some stretch of the imagination somehow be modified to "pass constitutional muster" as a war memorial.

The Mount Soledad Easter cross, erected in 1913, was first challenged in 1989 by the late Philip Paulson, the recipient in 2006 of FFRF's first Atheist in Foxhole Award. (He died at age 59 of liver cancer shortly after accepting the honor). Federal courts ruled in his favor in 1991 and 2005, but removal of the cross was thwarted by various machinations, including transfer of the land by Congress to the U.S. Department of Defense in 2006.

After Paulson's illness was diagnosed, Steve Trunk, another San Diego-area vet and atheist, became party to the complicated lawsuit. Trunk, a longtime Foundation Board Member, had come up with the idea of an award for foxhole atheists.

In a 56-page opinion, Judge M. Margaret McKeown wrote that "having considered its history, its religious and non-religious uses, its sectarian and secular features, the history of war memorials and dominance of the Cross — we conclude that the Memorial, presently configured and as a whole, primarily conveys a message of government endorsement of religion that violates" the constitutional provision of separation of church and state.

In recent years, small plaques have been placed on walls at the base of the cross in remembrance of military veterans. McKeown said that did not change the fact that the cross is primarily a Christian symbol.

Defendants in the case are the city of San Diego, the U.S. government and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

According to San Diego City Attorney Jan Goldsmith, the practical effect of the appeals court decision is that the cross will have to be removed unless a full panel of appeals judges reverses the ruling or the Supreme Court accepts review and reverses it.

Trunk discussed the victory on the Jan. 8 Freethought Radio show:

ffrf.org/news/radio/

In God We Trust, then horse manure

The next order of business for the Norco, Calif., City Council after voting 4-0 to install "In God We Trust" in its chambers was to put off a vote on whether to hire Chevron to study turning the city's huge supply of horse manure into energy. Lots of people ride horses around Riverside County.

"I believe it will snowball from here," Councilman Harvey Sullivan said at the Dec. 15 meeting. [He likely meant snowballing public trust in God, not in efficient energy from horse manure, which, as manures go, is quite light and nowhere near as dense as cow pie.]

The Riverside Press-Enterprise reported that six people spoke in favor of

the motto and no one opposed it. "It's not a question of church versus state," said resident Linda Dixon. "Our current educators should teach the true history of what has made this country great and not question the validity of everything good."

In a letter to Mayor Berwin Hanna from FFRF trying to head off the resolution, Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, disagreed. "Elected officials should not use their government position and government buildings as a place for promoting their religious views," wrote Gaylor.

Since 2001, a California group called In God We Trust America Inc. has worked to put the statement in "every city, county and state chamber in America."

Court: Commandments display 'a sham'

A three-judge panel of the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals on Feb. 2 upheld a district court decision that ruled a courtroom Ten Commandments display unconstitutionally endorsed religion.

The case dates to 2000 when Judge James DeWeese of the Richland County [Ohio] Court of Common Pleas hung a Ten Commandments in his courtroom. The American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio sued and won. In 2006, DeWeese hung another poster with the Ten Commandments but entitled "Philosophies of Law in Conflict." The ACLU filed a new suit in 2008.

The appeals court rejected DeWeese's argument that the poster constitutes protected speech.

"DeWeese's posters are situated in a courtroom, a public space, and were placed on the wall by a sitting judge charged with the decoration of that space while in office and presiding in the same courtroom. As such, we reject DeWeese's contention that the display constitutes private religious expression protected by the Free Speech Clause, falling beyond the bounds of Establishment Clause scrutiny," wrote Judge Eric Clay. "[T]he history of Defendant's actions demonstrates that any purported secular purpose is a sham."

The court rejected what it called DeWeese's attempt "to veil his religious purpose by casting his religious advocacy in philosophical terms."

50th state first to stop prayer

The state Senate in Hawaii by unanimous vote Jan. 20 agreed to stop opening daily sessions with prayers, making it the first state legislative body in the nation to halt the practice.

Senate rules previously said each session "shall open with an invocation."

Majority Leader Brickwood Galuteria said new rules are flexible and allow prayers at the Senate's discretion, such as on the opening day of each session, according to the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. House leaders are still drafting rules and opened the new session with a moment of silence.

As reported in Freethought Today [Dec10], Mitch Kahle, president of Hawaii Citizens for the Separation of State and Church and an FFRF member, was assaulted by security in the Senate last April while standing to verbally object to the prayer. In December, a judge chastised the state for trying to pros-

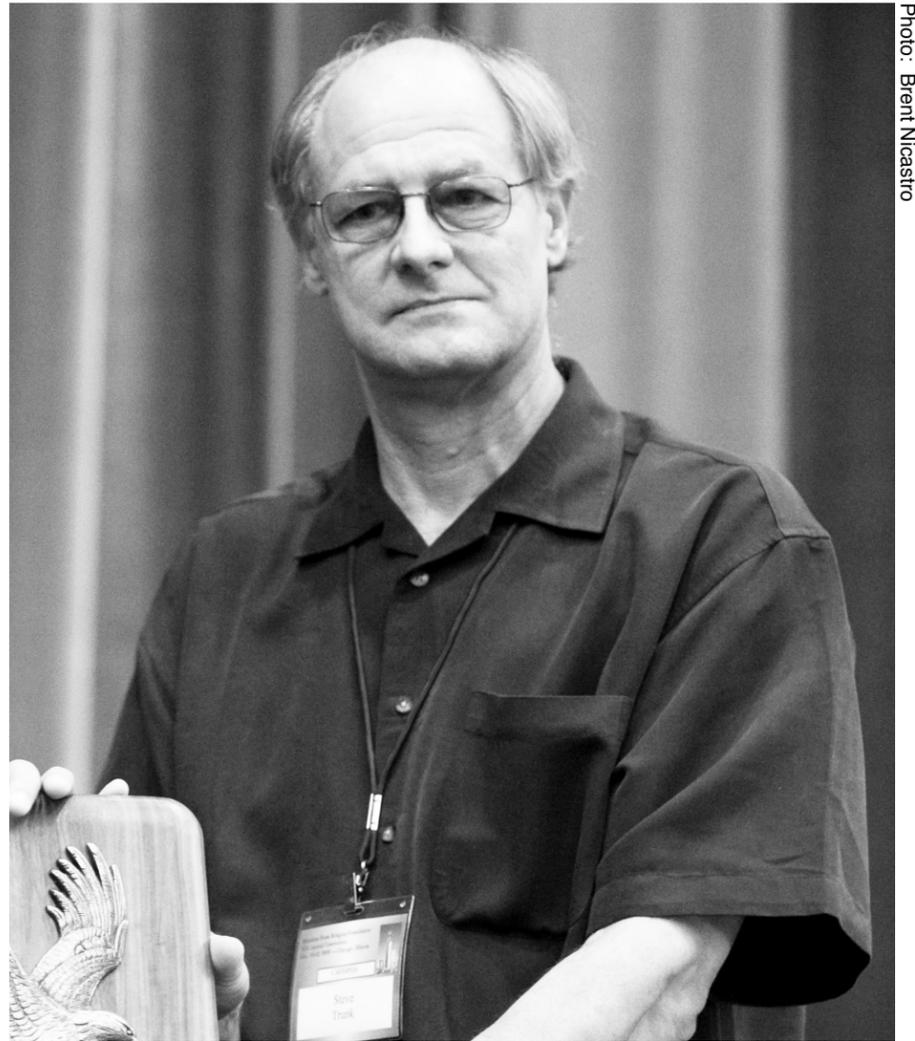


Photo: Brent Nicastro

Steve Trunk, FFRF Board Member, Lifetime Member and plaintiff in the Mount Soledad cross case, will receive the 2011 Atheist in Foxhole Award at the October convention in Hartford, Conn. (See more on page 24.)

ecute Kahle. He has filed a lawsuit.

Sen. Sam Slom, the chamber's sole Republican, was the only one to speak against the rule change in debate.

Kahle's group has also objected to the consolidated city-county government of Honolulu giving churches free garbage collection.

"With 849 churches on Oahu, receiving service twice per week, it is reasonable to assume this giveaway is costing taxpayers at least \$1 million annually in revenue from lost fees," said Kahle's Jan. 7 letter. "In addition, the cost of providing said services must also result in substantial direct cost to taxpayers, including but not necessarily limited to, expenditures for trucks, equipment, maintenance, employee salaries and benefits and disposal costs."

The free service is illegal, Kahle said, because of a provision in the state Constitution that bans tax levies or spending "except for a public purpose."

Kahle, who will be named Freethinker of the Year at FFRF's 2011 convention, discussed his battle against legislative prayer Jan. 29 on Freethought Radio: ffrf.org/news/radio/

Newdow petitions for SCOTUS review

California attorney Michael Newdow filed a petition Jan. 11 asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review an appeals court's 2010 rejection of his challenge to the placement of "In God We Trust" on U.S. currency as a violation of the separation of state and church.

"Devout atheists are forced to choose between not using what is often the only available legal tender and committing what they consider blasphemy," Newdow argued in his petition. Newdow has separately challenged the phrase "So help me God" in the presidential oath and said he will also petition the court to remove "one nation under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance.

Newdow told McClatchy News that the odds are stacked against him. "I think it is a sheer cliff with any court

comprised of justices who are not atheists themselves. I think they would rather avoid the political fallout than do what they are paid to do and uphold the rights of this disenfranchised minority; i.e., atheists."

The court gets about 8,000 petitions a year and only hears about 80 cases. Four justices would have to agree to hear Newdow's appeal.

Another battle over church and plate

The state of Vermont agreed in January to issue a vanity plate that says JN36TN to Shawn Byrne of West Rutland. It refers to John 3:16 in the New Testament.

The Vermont DMV had refused to issue it due to a policy barring religious messages. The 2nd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals overruled a district court and said the ban was unconstitutional. Vermont Assistant Attorney General Bridget Asay said the state decided not to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

UW Regents contest Catholic club ruling

The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents asked the U.S. Supreme Court on Nov. 30 to review a 2010 federal appeals court ruling that required UW-Madison to fund religious worship activities.

The 2-1 decision in *Badger Catholic Inc. v. Walsh* by the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals said the university's refusal to fully fund Badger Catholic, a registered student group formerly called the Roman Catholic Foundation, violated its rights to free speech.

Badger Catholic had requested \$253,000 in student fees. The university funded most of that, but declined to approve about \$35,000 earmarked for six religious worship activities. The university maintains it may limit use of public funds for religious worship within the limited public forum it has created for expressive student activities.



Letterbox

God doesn't answer any 9-1-1 calls

I enjoyed the "Out of the Closet" billboards. I have been an atheist all of my life, even as a child, and it was very comforting to see those billboards. So I joined FFRF and read Dan Barker's *Godless*. I am happy to see the great things being done by the organization, and my support will continue.

I am a paramedic who is on the streets every day risking my life for others, regardless of their race, creed, color, sexual orientation or religious beliefs. And I am an atheist.

I have compassion, don't I? I have morals, don't I? My religious colleagues are under the impression that God has made me a paramedic. I, however, strongly disagree and tell them that "God doesn't answer 9-1-1 calls, good people do." That tends to make them freeze and think for a moment.

If such a statement can make a paramedic think about who the real hero is, maybe it can make others do the same. Please consider it for "Out of the Closet."

Ruben F. Ortiz, MICP
New Jersey

Marquee Madness



Knox City, Texas

J.R. Staton, Oklahoma: "Ironically, I saw this shortly after listening to Freethought Radio's podcast with Daniel Dennett discussing atheist pastors."



First de-ice your wings

"This is one of many reasons why religion is dangerous!" — **Dr. Stephen B. Wilson, New York**



Sold out of lamb?

And so much tastier than a grilled cheese virgin!

— **Robert Navrotsky, Pennsylvania**

Panelist harassed for lack of belief

I work as a professional staff member at a public university in Missouri, where I was asked to sit on a panel that was part of a series titled "What does it mean to be ——— in America."

I sat first on the "Gay in America" panel. Everyone was polite and respectful. I was then asked to sit on the "Religious/Spiritual in America" panel as the only atheist they could find. I agreed, thinking the panel and audience would be the same. Boy, was I wrong.

I was harassed not only by the audience members, but the other panelists as well. I made sure I was respectful and did not point out the hypocrisy of most of their statements, as the panel was to provide information, not debate the issue. But the minute I opened my mouth, I was berated for my lack of religious belief.

Two hours later, I was shaken and disturbed by the lack of decency, common sense and shame that was thrown at me. At least the moderator tried to step in and help, but they ignored her.

I give everyone at FFRF my utmost thanks. I hope that someday I can find other freethinkers near me so I don't feel quite so alone.

Dany Thompson
Missouri

Can't come out till the coast is clear

Reading Freethought Today, I felt in good company as I read about my fellow closeted atheists. Fearing societal repercussions or the backlash to a business, I certainly understand. I too cannot declare my independence from ignorance yet. I have peeked from the closet doors and shared the good news with family and a few friends, but have not yet been able to expose myself fully. It would put my business at great risk.

Daily I receive over 50 e-mails from customers and interested parties. Many end with "God Bless You, you are an angel" or the likes. This is quite a conundrum for me. I proudly display atheist and freethought stickers on my vehicles. I have a red ink stamp that I slyly cover the "In God we trust" with the ever popular "Atheist Money" text.

My nonbelief is well known to my family. Recently, the bishop of the LDS church where my parents faithfully surrender reason a couple of times a week asked my father if he could send the missionaries by my house. Dad told him only if he wants to lose two missionaries to the other side.

I long for the day when I can proudly display the "A" on my website or open a dialogue when a customer says Jesus told them to contact me. If they only knew.

There is much that we in the closet can do. We can support FFRF, donate to the Legal Fund or support a billboard campaign. The beauty of all this effort is that more and more people see these wonderful displays and come out. They may have never considered joining a group. Many young people today are freethinking atheists, raised in secular homes, and are closeted only because they never considered its importance or beauty.

These billboards and lawsuits are crucial. They allow us to be a part of the movement to a more secular so-

ciety. We closeted atheists can follow the headline news section and Action Alerts at ffrf.org. I link to news stories and leave comments for local online readers. This is small but definitely not useless.

Others see the billboards, read the comments, hear of the lawsuits and letters of complaint and don't feel as alone. Many of them look up FFRF and join. I was an atheist for a while before I found FFRF, all thanks to a news article. We closeted atheists can support FFRF, watch it grow and see its positive impact on society. This will speed the time in which the majority don't see us as Satan incarnate.

I welcome the day when I can sign every e-mail with "may God B-less" or I am able to go to my hometown with my atheist bumper stickers or I can proudly put my face on a coming-out billboard. When I can sign my name to a comment I've posted about the Soddy-Daisy [football prayer] stories, that will be a proud day.

I thank you all. You give me hope that my children and future grandchildren may be able to live in a world with less religion. You make me proud. You are very much like my own secret army that allows me to remain the good cop until the coast is clear. You fight my battles, you stand up for humanity, and you liberate the mind.

I love you all.

Ben Wilson
Florida

Surely, hosts of angels would approve

Until a recent Friday night, my commitment to becoming a Lifetime Member was only semi-serious.

I was a passenger in a car heading home about midnight when we were hit by a drunk driver. The rear half of our car was sheared off, and the other vehicle hit about 15 inches from where I sat.

As much as I have appreciated the friendly wishes I got while hospitalized and afterward for relatively minor injuries, there were many pronouncements that I'd been protected by angels or by God, which I deferentially acknowledged and noted. It's more about my gentle temperament than it is about my convictions that I didn't ask them why the angels let the drunk driver hit us in the first place.

I realized that that Friday could have been my last day, as any day can be, and that I hadn't followed through on my long-term goal to become a Lifetime Member and tell you all how much I appreciate your work. I truly appreciate your courageous work on behalf of our freedoms.

Please find enclosed my check for \$1,000. It's money very well spent.

Bryan Dunn
Texas

I am authorizing payment for a Life Membership. I feel like the stifling influence of my childhood religious indoctrination was crippling. It caused me to be rigid, unforgiving and judgmental of others. Even though I have long since left the dogma behind, it created a dreadful mindset that prevented me from enjoying life as I should have. Well, that's water over the damned dam, so to speak, and there isn't much point in dwelling on it.

I look forward to reading your publications. The essays are thoughtful and intellectually invigorating, and exposés of clerical misbehavior are both amusing and depressing. I even

get perverse pleasure in reading the illiterate ravings of the bible-thumping reactionaries.

I would hope that my contribution will help some young people struggling as I did, and perhaps spare them some of the anxieties and disappointments I went through in my misspent youth.

L. Kristofer Thomsen
Illinois

I just read the Dec. 15 Freethought of the Day about the 219th anniversary of ratification of the Bill of Rights to the Constitution, and a deep sense of delight rushed through my bones. I couldn't be prouder of this organization.

To win this battle against the Christianization of our Constitution and country, we need to win the hearts and minds of the nation. I've always considered FFRF to be great at the latter but not so good at the former. That is, until I read about the Out of the Closet billboard. I think this campaign is truly brilliant. Putting a face to the title of "atheist" is winning over hearts every day people drive past the billboards.

FFRF is moving in the right direction, and I've enclosed two checks to help build momentum: \$500 for Out of the Closet and \$500 for the general Legal Fund. Thank you for your diligence!

Keith Dricken
North Carolina

After at least 20 years of membership, it's time to become a Lifetime Member. Over the years, I have been so pleased to belong to such a vital and active organization and look forward each month to the arrival of Freethought Today.

I am especially proud of the rapid growth of our membership over the past two or three years. I think that can be attributed to the billboard and bus campaigns. Whoever thought those up deserves a "stroke of genius" award. I look at the advertising as letting people know that someone is looking out for our minority. It has been very comforting to me to know this. I only hope that someday we will be large enough to have a voting bloc that will have as much clout as the Religious Right.

Thanks for all your hard work and excellent management of our donated money. I look forward to many more years of membership.

Jayne M. Edwards
Virgin Islands

Enclosed is my \$5,000 check to help finance the much needed expansion of Freethought Hall. The project is a worthy purpose for my savings over the years. Having my name as a major donor in Freethought Hall will be an honor indeed.

Frank Dowding
Minnesota

I enjoyed signing up as a member and donating to the cause to help educate the world. When I got Freethought Today in the mail, I didn't think I would really read it, but I loved it!

Being in the digital age with podcasts and Google News, I really don't read newspapers or magazines as I did in the past. But I really value your articles and information. Keep up the great work.

Greg Benusa
California

Please accept my check for Lifetime Membership. I am totally convinced that all religions and all “believers” are insane, and therefore I will not argue with them. I admire your patience. I know the money will be put to good use.

Karl E. Jonasson
California

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Thank you so much for what you do. I enjoy the newspaper so much. Recently, in particular, I have found the college essays to be fantastic. I am proud to become a Life Member.

Winfred Emmons
Texas

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Here is my donation of \$500 for the building expansion. I wish I could give more, but every little bit helps, as they say.

If it weren't for the work FFRF does, religious fanatics would take over the country. The nonreligious people would not have freedom at all. Keep up the good work.

Charles Saxton
Arkansas

Only you, not god, prevents forest fires



Evidence that there's “way too much religion in public life,” says Eleanor Pippitt, who sent in this Dart Flipcards trading card.

To keep the religious tide from engulfing our country, I am pledging \$10 a month to the FFRF Legal Fund.

In a world of label choices — atheist, Bright, agnostic, humanist, skeptic, secularist — “freethinker” is the most positive, descriptive and upbeat one. I tell people that “I've become something of a freethinker in my retirement.”

Eleanor Pippitt
California

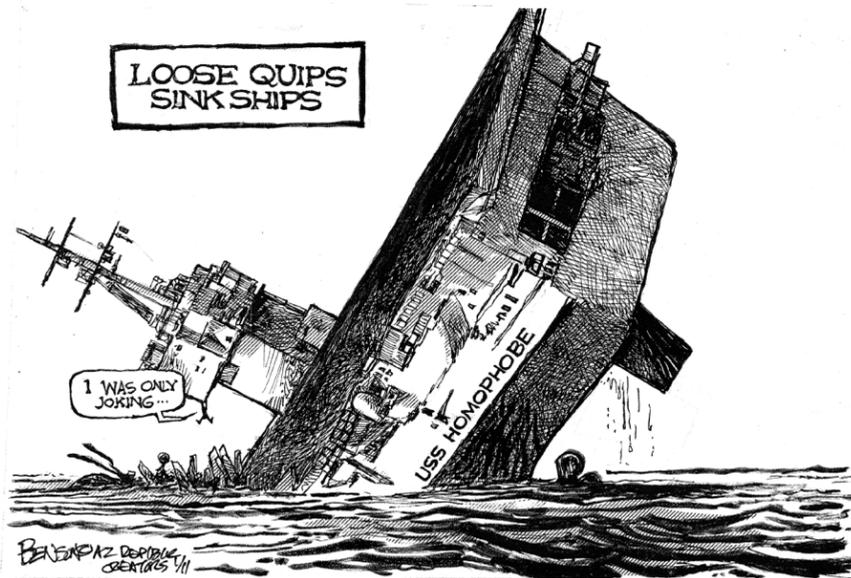
Gervais' atheist remark on TV was golden

I was channel-surfing when I caught the end of the Golden Globe awards just as the credits were rolling. Ricky Gervais was the host. For those of you who don't who he is, Gervais is a British comedian, actor and writer who co-created “The Office.” He's also an outspoken atheist.

At the very end of the telecast [seen by about 17 million viewers], Gervais was thanking people, parodying the celebrities' acceptance speeches. The last thing he said was, “And thank you to god — for making me an atheist.”

Woo-hoo! Testify, brother Ricky!

Kristine Danowski
Pennsylvania



It's not the label that's important

In answer to “Agnostic wonders if there's *something*” [Dec10], her questions are those I asked myself awhile back. Whether you are an atheist or not can depend on your definition of god. Why should I define my beliefs by the beliefs of others? Can I have a spiritual connection to the mystery of the cosmos without buying into the nonsense of religion?

Yes, you can. I belong to FFRF because I see religion as destructive of connecting to the true nature of the universe and humanity's place in it. To me, science, reason and spirit are all connected. There *is* something all right, but that something is undefinable. Therefore, it's best to concentrate on those things we can know exist and to make this world a better place for all life.

It loosely fit into the realm of the pantheist, or as Dawkins puts it, “a sexed-up atheist.” Define yourself however you please, or don't define yourself at all. In the cosmic scheme of things, it really doesn't matter.

Peter Hall
Oregon

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Since there is no evidence that there is “something, somewhere, somehow” [Dec10], we have no information regarding such a being's nature. We have no way of knowing if this supposed being is even aware of us, let alone is interested in or capable of caring about what we think our how we behave.

On that basis, I deny its existence, as I also deny the existence of Bertrand Russell's teapot.

Deborah Warcken
California

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Believers often argue that it is up to the skeptic to disprove the claims that believers make about the existence of gods, but that is illogical. In order to disprove any “X exists” type of claim (e.g., unicorns), one would have to scour the entire universe for absence of evidence of existence. Clearly, that is beyond human capabilities.

The believers' “disprove it” argument is a deliberate attempt to place an unreasonable, impossible burden on the skeptic. Unfortunately for believers, there is no such thing as a “burden of disproof” to be foisted onto the skeptic. The burden of proof belongs to the person who makes the positive claim that “X does exist,” and in order to make such a claim truthfully, the claimant must have, and present, credible, objective evidence to back the claim. Absence of evidence may not be evidence of absence, but it certainly isn't evidence of existence.

The atheist does not have to “know everything” in order to know that the believers' claims about gods are unsubstantiated. All the atheist has to know is that believers have never produced any credible, objective evidence to back their claims.

Lee Helms
Michigan

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We do not need to search the universe to prove that there is no god in particular or no supernatural in general, because there is precisely nothing to search for. Nothingness (e.g., god, devil, supernatural) cannot exist, cause or explain anything, because there is nothing to exist, nothing to cause anything and nothing with which to explain anything.

Nothingness (e.g., god, devil, supernatural) cannot be identified, located, observed, measured or experienced and cannot be used to predict, control or explain anything. It is true (i.e., totally accurate and totally reliable) that there is no god in particular and no supernatural in general.

It is known with total accuracy and total reliability that there is no god in particular and no supernatural in general. A gnostic atheist knows with total accuracy and total reliability that there is no god in particular and no supernatural in general.

Paul Keller
Wisconsin

'Best doctor's visit I've ever had'

I wore my “Freethinker FFRF” to a doctor's appointment. When my doctor leaned in to listen to my heart and breathing, he asked what FFRF stood for. I said, “It's the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which actively supports separation of church and state, and —”

Before I could go further, he stopped me and asked what my “leanings” were. I said, “Of course, I'm atheist. But even when I thought I was a believer, I didn't want the government in my religion. And now, now I just want religion to get the hell out of my government!”

He grinned hugely and gestured at the rest of the office (and city) outside the exam room and said, “I know! These people, there's no talking to them. It's pure, blind *faith*. And the way they twist the history of our nation! You know, the founders were mostly Freemasons who believed — well, they believed in *something*, but it wasn't Jesus and God and everything those people are saying about them now!”

I concurred and told him the term he was looking for was “deist.”

“If the founders wanted a Christian government,” I said, “how come they

only mention religion twice, and then only in exclusionary terms: ‘Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion,’ and that there shall be no test of religion to hold an elected position?”

He said something about how hard it was to be an atheist in Texas, and that there are so many highly educated people here who are still so unbelievably stupid. He took 40% off my bill because I don't have insurance and called it an “Insider's Discount.”

He then wished me (with the exam room door open and him headed out into the hallway) “A happy Roman holiday!” Then he stuck his head back in the room while pulling the door mostly closed and said, “None of this gets out!” while grinning widely.

Without a doubt, the best doctor's visit I've ever had.

Michele Azzaro
Texas

Pledge gets rewrite, why don't prayers?

It's now well over half a century since the phrase “under God” was inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance. If we can't undo that, for the sake of consistency, shouldn't we amend the Lord's Prayer as well? Maybe to “Our Father, who art in heaven, and who hovereth closely over the United States of America, and payeth special attention to how He can best serve the needs of the citizens of this Christian nation, hallowed be thy name.”

While we're rewriting, let's go to Matthew 6:6 and take out the part where Jesus suggests people pray in private rather than in public. Evidently, His wisdom no longer applies.

Chuck Berry
Pennsylvania

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OK, that's it, as far as I'm concerned — no more fiddling with the pledge. First the religionists added “under God.” After that it was “for the born and unborn.” What's next, “with liberty and justice and freedom from taxes for all”?

I've been queasy about the pledge for a long time. What does it mean when you pledge allegiance to a flag? I'll pledge allegiance and be loyal to the USA any day, any time, anywhere. But how the hell can you be loyal to a flag?

I have no doubt that it will soon become traditional to recite the pledge and, at the conclusion, say “amen.”

Paul A. Alter
Pennsylvania

Interview strikes chord with former Witness

I just listened to Freethought Radio's interview with Sarah Braasch, and it made me go back and download the 8/16/08 podcast featuring Sarah, which really struck a chord with me.

I am a new FFRF member. I was also raised as a Jehovah's Witness. At one point I was appointed a “ministerial servant,” which is basically an elder in training. I was recently kicked out, at age 32, as a heretic for admitting to believing in evolution and doubting the existence of god. I am shunned by family and former friends, but I think it was worth it.

Everything Sarah said was true, but there are many other reasons she didn't mention that make this religion especially evil. For one, they isolate

Continued on next page



Letterbox

Continued from previous page
you. One of the first things you must do when you join is cut your ties with non-Witnesses. Growing up, I was never allowed to be friends with anyone who was not a Witness. Those on the outside were constantly demonized as immoral and untrustworthy. They actively discourage higher education. They intensely pressure teens to evangelize full time. Those who are more active expect financial support from those who do less.

I really appreciate the light FFRF shines on the dangers of this particular religion, and I hope you continue to do the same in the future.

Jason Lien
Washington

P.S.: I first heard of you via your bus sign campaign in Seattle. I hope to see more in the future.

Hate mail fails as recruiting tool

On reading some of the vicious hate mail that you receive, I can't help wondering whether those people realize what damage they are doing to their own viewpoint, much more than to yours, simply by displaying their own vulgarity and ignorance.

Certainly, no thinking person would want to come anywhere near a belief system supported by people of that ilk. If that's Christianity, one would say, then one would surely prefer to associate with non-Christians!

Barbara G. Walker, Lifetime Member
Florida

Two Rays to brighten everyone's days

[Ray Bradley, North Carolina, sent this tongue-in-cheek response following an FFRF Action Alert involving Campbell County Mayor William Baird of Jacksboro, Tenn. Baird had defended a nativity scene at a state park with a "We're a Christian community" comment.]

Mayor Baird: I am very glad that there are still God-fearing Christians like you willing to stand up against minorities who don't know Campbell County is a Christian community. It's time people realize this nation is ruled by the majority. If Muslims, Jews, atheists or other minorities who don't believe in the Christ Jesus disagree, they should keep quiet or get out. They have no rights in this Christian nation to oppose government-sponsored Christmas displays. And if they want displays of their own, they can put them on their own property, not on any public lands paid for by Christian taxpayers.

Eventually, when enough people

like you run these minorities out of this God-given land, we can start working on the misguided factions of Christ like the Mormons, the Catholics and the Quakers. Keep up the fight! God bless America: One nation, under God, and soon to be indivisible once we get rid of everyone with different views.

Ray (not associated with the god Ra)

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[Ray Lynch, Colorado, responded to a letter to the editor in which the writer, Colette L., quoted scripture to implore America to "get down on your knees and repent."]

It's daunting that religion must bully people to worship or obey as Colette L. felt compelled to do. Why stop there? Let's quote some more scripture, like Leviticus 20:13 and condemn our homosexual sons to death. Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Mark 7:9-13 and so on.

Young people, don't let the holy men and the Colettes bully you with their fearmongering. They say you'll reap everlasting life if you follow some holy man's edicts. Can you say Christian Taliban? You're going to have a full life on this planet because you're a good person who loves humankind and yearns to make this world better because you were here. That's everlasting enough for me.

If enough religious bullies are encouraged in our society, can it be long before their fanaticism is also encouraged? Had Colette studied history along with her bible, she would know that there was a time when people were forced to pray and believe in religion. It was called the Dark Ages.

Toast (with tea) for FFRF's esprit

Reason's greetings from Canada! The favorite part of my day is my morning "devotionals," when I read Freethought Today over tea and toast. Your brilliant legal victories, billboard campaigns, debates and burgeoning membership letters are a life-saving beacon of rationality.

When people ask why I'm an atheist, I say, "Why not?" Religion tells us the world is a heinous place of evil, suffering and filthy sinners, where the only happiness is living in a fairy tale, and the only escape is death.

Science shows us how amazing and unique a speck we are in the universe — the only world teeming with life that we know of. Science helps us to explore its wonders, find answers to our questions and solutions to our problems (if we'd only quit catering to religion).

Judy Loewen
Alberta, Canada



Mike Keefe for THE DENVER POST 12-24-10 www.caglecartoons.com

Overheard

Atheists think for themselves and examine all available evidence with a critical eye. They tend to be unconcerned with what others think of their opinions, and honest with themselves when presented with empirical evidence contrary to what they might have once believed. They are also rightfully wary of organized religion and the dangers of charismatic religious leaders.

Unnamed "person of faith" responding to a challenge to say one nice thing about atheism

The Sceptical Scribe, 12-15-10

You know, you get to that age, you haven't even kissed your first girl yet. And here you've got this guy kissing you. He did some harm.

John Purdy, St. Paul, Minn., one of 21 men accusing Raimond Rose of the De La Salle Christian Brothers of molesting them as far back as the 1960s

Associated Press, 12-7-10

The GPS tracking device fits inside the Christmas decoration, features motion-activated tracking and sends text messages and e-mail alerts if the figurine moves. Baby Jesus has successfully been tracked to a thief's apartment and then recovered.

Story on BrickHouse Security's free GPS Jesus program

Computerworld, 12-16-10

Person A is driving along I-75 from a monster truck rally. Person B, a drunk driver, crosses the median at 65 mph and slams into Person A's car, killing him and his pet llama instantly. Person B, while dinged up a bit, lives to become an inmate's boy toy, but will most likely be released on parole three years later thanks to our great "justice" system. Now which person was God with? Logic would tell me "the drunk driver." Naturally, people of faith have some platitudes to dismiss my reasoning.

John Danz Jr., on crediting God instead of luck or human ingenuity

The Student Operated Press, 12-15-10

The locker room is a religion- and politics-free zone, where everyone can spend their free time in a neutral manner.

Notice at Lady Fitness gym asking women not to pray on the premises, a ban objected to by Muslims but upheld by Eva Biaudet, Finland's minority ombudsman

Helsingin Sanomat, 12-20-10

Sure, people will say Jesus is the reason for the season, but Thor is the reason the fifth day of the week is named Thursday. That doesn't mean I celebrate Thor. The fact is, people don't open the Gospel and read why Jesus came.

Rev. Ed Stetzer, Baptist pastor and

president of LifeWay ("Biblical Solutions for Life")

USA Today, 12-20-10

It's time for Belmont University to change and to recognize that we have gay students, faculty and staff. Belmont has to decide whether they want to be a national recognized university — particularly with their School of Music business — or they want to be a church. **Mike "The Candy Man" Curb, Nashville, Tenn., Curb Records president, on the Christian school firing a gay women's soccer coach**

The Tennessean, 12-8-10

Dear Super Christians: I have nothing against your religion, but I would like you to keep your beliefs to yourself and off Facebook, which is a website of many different faiths. I'm going to start deleting people who post bible quotes constantly.

Post by Gordie Mann

Facebook, 1-10-11

I must admit that I read the religion section partially for a laugh. Why else? To keep an eye on things that I am wary of: anti-intellectualism, pseudoscience, lying to children, extremism, scriptural literalism, anti-blasphemy laws and the like. If you don't know what you are up against, you can't fight it as well as you could or should. I am for a free and secular society where the individual is protected from not just the majority, but from the moral laws of the religious. And so while I do read the oddest articles for a cheap chuckle, I tend to read to gird myself to protect individual liberty.

Alex Wilhelm, atheist blogger, answering why he reads the religion section

Huffington Post, 1-11-11

Hardcore Christians tell me the bible calls homosexuality "an abomination." What they fail to mention is that it's only one of several hundred abominations, including wearing clothes made of more than one material. Better send all those blends to Goodwill. When I point that out, they change gears and ask why I'm endorsing the gay agenda. Gays have an agenda? Ever watch "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy"? You can't get five gay guys to agree on drapes, much less an agenda!

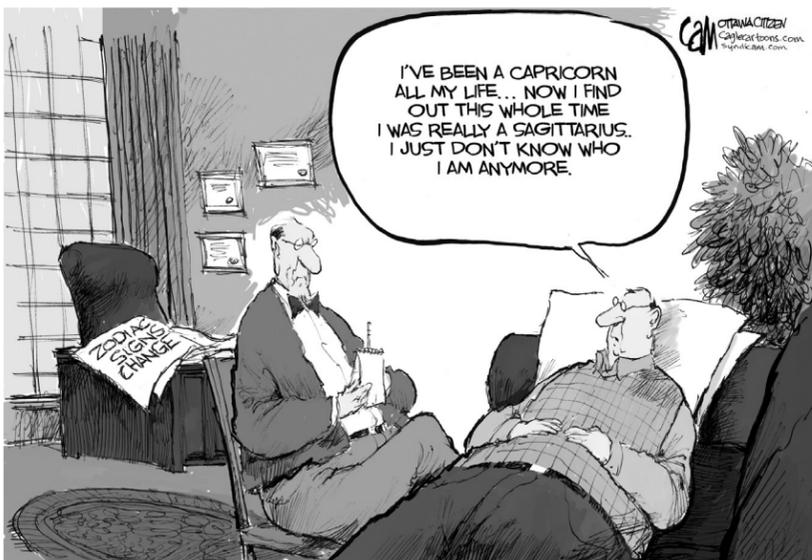
Atheist comedian Frank King, answering why he reads the religion section

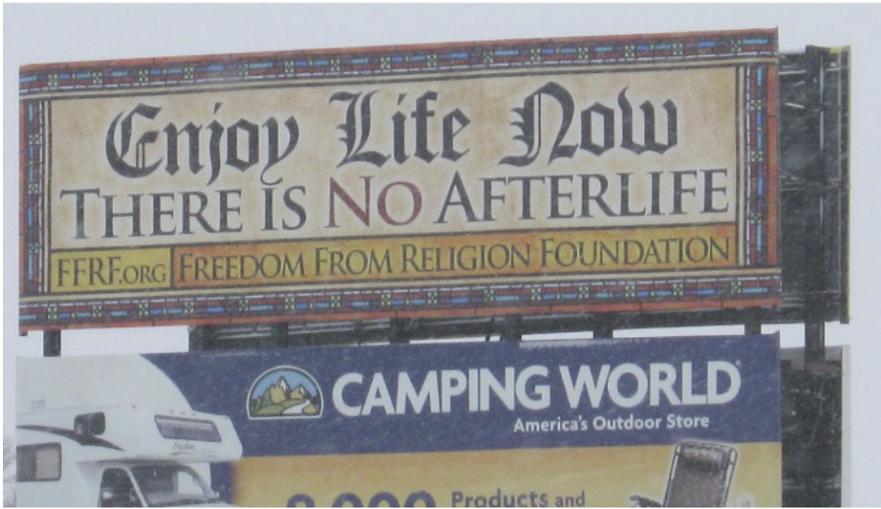
Huffington Post, 1-11-11

A locked box containing an unusual combination of valuables was stolen from a Flint home on Tuesday, according to a police report. Inside the box were four bottles of methadone and a white leather family bible.

News story on burglary

The Flint [Mich.] Journal, 1-26-11





Go for it!

FFRF Lifetime Member Wayne Hensler of rural Waterloo, Wis., sponsored this billboard for six weeks on U.S. 151 near Columbus, Wis. The octogenarian placed a similar billboard last year in a different location as a freethought legacy to his nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. He hopes that other FFRF members might be “inspired” to place similar messages in their areas on behalf of the Foundation.

“It’s something that will make people think a little bit, and maybe help them make a little more joy in life,” remarked Hensler.

Rally for agnostic dad’s custody rights

Supporters braved the cold Dec. 16 in Anderson, Ind., to back Craig Scarberry, an agnostic who lost custody of his three children due to a judge’s open religious bias in Scarberry’s divorce case. Reba Boyd Wooden, FFRF member and executive director of the Center for Inquiry Indiana, is second from left. Scarberry was a Jan. 8 guest on Freethought Radio: ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/

Huge news, but barely noticed

This was first published Nov. 9, 2010, in The Charleston Gazette and is reprinted with permission.

By James A. Haught



of Americans, especially the young, who answer “none” when asked their religion. In 1990, this group had climbed to 8%, and by 2008 it had doubled to 15%, plus

another 5% who answer “don’t know.” This implies that around 45 million U.S. adults today lack church affiliation. In Hawaii, more than half say they have no church connection.

• **Mainline losses.** America’s traditional Protestant churches — “tall steeple” denominations with seminary-trained clergy — once dominated U.S. culture. They were the essence of America. But their membership is collapsing. Over the past half-century, while the U.S. population doubled, United Methodists fell from 11 million to 7.9 million, Episcopalians dropped from 3.4 million to 2 million, the Presbyterian Church USA sank from 4.1 million to 2.2 million, etc. The religious journal *First Things* — noting that mainline faiths dwindled from 50% of the adult U.S. population to a mere 8% — lamented that “the Great Church of America has come to an end.” A researcher at the Ashbrook think tank dubbed it “Flatline Protestantism.”

• **Catholic losses.** Although Hispanic immigration resupplies U.S. Catholicism with replacements, many former adherents have drifted from the giant church. The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey found that 20 million Americans have quit Catholicism — thus one-tenth of U.S. adults now are ex-Catholics.

• **Fading taboos.** A half-century ago, church-backed laws had power in America. In the 1950s, it was a crime to look at the equivalent of a *Playboy* magazine or R-rated movie — or for stores to open on the Sabbath — or to buy a cocktail or lottery ticket — or to sell birth-control devices in some states — or to be homosexual — or to terminate a pregnancy — or to read a sexy novel — or for an unwed couple to share a bedroom. Now all those morality laws have fallen, one after another. Currently, state after state is legalizing

Little noticed, secularism keeps climbing in the U.S.

gay marriage, despite church outrage.

Sociologists are fascinated by America’s secular shift. Dr. Robert Putnam of Harvard, author of *Bowling Alone*, found as many as 40% of young Americans answering “none” to faith surveys. “It’s a huge change, a stunning development,” he said. “That is the future of America.” He joined Dr. David Campbell of Notre Dame in writing a new book, *American Grace*, that outlines the trend. Putnam’s Social Capital site sums up: “Young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six times the historic rate.”

Oddly, males outnumber females among the churchless. “The ratio of 60 males to 40 females is a remarkable result,” the 2008 ARIS poll reported. “These gender patterns correspond with many earlier findings that show women to be more religious than men.”

Growing secularism has political implications. The Republican Party may suffer as the white evangelical Religious Right shrinks. In contrast, burgeoning “nones” tend to vote Democratic. Sociologist Ruy Teixeira says the steady rise of the unaffiliated, plus swelling minorities, means that “by the 2016 election (or 2020 at the outside) the United States will have ceased to be a white Christian nation. Looking even farther down the road, white Christians will be only around 35% of the population by 2040, and conservative white Christians, who have been such a critical part of the Republican base, will be only about a third of that — a minority within a minority.”

Gradually, decade by decade, religion is moving from the advanced First World to the less-developed Third World. Faith retains enormous power in Muslim lands. Pentecostalism is booming in Africa and South America. Yet the West steadily turns more secu-

lar.

Arguably, it’s one of the biggest news stories during our lives, although most of us are too busy to notice. Durant may have been correct when he wrote that it is the basic event of modern times.

*James Haught, editor of The Charleston Gazette, West Virginia’s largest newspaper, can be reached at 304-348-5199 or at haught@wvgazette.com. This essay is adapted from his ninth book, **Fading Faith: The Rise of the Secular Age**.*

They Said What?

No demons, nor angels nor DAs can keep you separated from the love of Jesus Christ.

Former U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, paraphrasing Romans 8 while the jury deliberated money-laundering and conspiracy charges, on which he was convicted
Houston Chronicle, 11-23-10

We have been placed here for a reason and a short season. Let us make the most of it.

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, declaring his Inauguration Day “a gift from God”
Wichita Eagle, 1-12-11

It’s a symbol of constitutional government. It’s a symbol of Jesus Christ above all else. It’s a symbol of biblical government.

Newly elected Arkansas GOP state Rep. Loy Mauch, on the meaning of the Confederate flag
Arkansas Times, 11-11-10

I want to make private schools more accessible to Republican Christian families that cannot afford to pay high tuition and for those who cannot home school their children.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, speech to the Houston Chamber of Commerce
Burnt Orange Report, 1-27-11

Philosopher-historian Will Durant called it “the basic event of modern times.” He didn’t mean the world wars, or the end of colonialism, or the rise of electronics. He was talking about the decline of religion in Western democracies.

The great mentor saw subsiding faith as the most profound occurrence of the past century — a shift of Western civilization, rather like former transitions away from the age of kings, the era of slavery and such epochs.

Since World War II, worship has dwindled starkly in Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan and other advanced democracies. In those busy places, only 5 or 10% of adults now attend church. Secular society scurries along heedlessly.

Pope Benedict XVI protested: “Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner unknown before now to humanity, excludes God from the public conscience.” Columnist George Will called the Vatican “109 acres of faith in a European sea of unbelief.”

America seems an exception. This country has 350,000 churches whose members donate \$100 billion per year. The United States teems with booming megachurches, gigantic sales of “Rapture” books, fundamentalist attacks on evolution, hundred-million-dollar TV ministries, talking-in-tongues Pentecostals, the white evangelical Religious Right attached to the Republican Party, and the like.

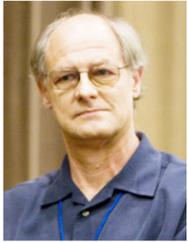
But quietly, under the radar, much of America slowly is following the path previously taken by Europe. Little noticed, secularism keeps climbing in the U.S. Here’s the evidence:

• **Rising “nones.”** Various polls find a strong increase in the number

34th FFRF convo, Hartford, Conn., Oct. 7-9

Coyne, activists, Twain tour on program

The Foundation's 34th annual convention is set for Hartford, Conn., at the Marriott Hartford Downtown on the weekend of Oct. 7-9, 2011.



Steve Trunk



Mitch Kahle

and Evolution at the University of Chicago, is author of the 2009 book, *Why Evolution is True*. His plain-spoken column, "Science and religion aren't friends," appeared in USA Today in October 2010, in which he

wrote: "Science and faith are fundamentally incompatible, and for precisely the same reason that irrationality and rationality are incompatible. They are different forms of inquiry, with only one, science, equipped to find real truth. And while they may have a dialogue, it's not a constructive one. Science helps religion only by disproving its claims, while religion has nothing to add to science."

Also receiving awards will be two FFRF activists. **Steve Trunk**, an FFRF Board and Lifetime Member, will receive the Atheist in Foxhole Award as plaintiff in a lawsuit in which the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in January declared the Mount Soledad cross in San Diego unconstitutional.

Mitch Kahle, founder of Hawaii Citizens for the Separation of State and Church, will be named Freethinker of the Year for persuading the Hawaii Senate in January to drop prayers to open legislative sessions. Kahle, a long-time FFRF supporter, was roughed up by Senate security for protesting

prayers. (For more details on the activists' achievements, see State/Church Bulletin starting on page 6.)

The convention will open formally on Friday night with speeches and a celebratory dessert reception, continue through Saturday and conclude by noon Sunday morning after membership and Board of Director meetings. To tour the Twain house, plan your itinerary to make time on Friday afternoon.

FFRF group rates at the Marriott Hartford Downtown, 200 Columbus Blvd., Hartford, Conn., are \$159 plus tax, single, double, triple or quadruple. Reserve your rooms directly by requesting "Freedom From Religion Foundation" Group Block by calling toll-free to 866-373-9806.

Rooms for FFRF conventions always go fast, so plan ahead to avoid disappointment. Rooms are held until Sept. 6 unless filled before then. **Head's up:** There are no shuttles from the airport. Taxi rides from airport to hotel typically run \$36 to \$44, so try to share. FFRF decreased its convention registration rates accordingly. Parking is \$19 daily/\$23 valet. Union Station is less than a mile from the hotel.

To register for the convention (only \$50 per member, \$55 per spouse or companion accompanying member,



Jerry Coyne

\$95 for non-member), send back the handy registration form this on page or go online to:

ffrf.org/outreach/convention

The optional Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast, \$25 (including 21% gratuity and 6% tax), features scrambled eggs, applewood bacon, roasted potatoes, Parmesan-crusted tomato, juice and hot beverages. A vegetarian option substitutes fruit for bacon. Chef's choice vegan and gluten-free are also available.

Dinner, \$45, is Andora chicken served with greens and mozzarella, rolls, coffee/tea, starch, and chocolate truffle cake.

Vegetarian includes all of above, but the entrée is vegetable strudel (grilled vegetables in a puff pastry). Chef's choice vegan and gluten-free options are likewise available for dinner.

Reserve spot now for Twain group tour

Hartford, Conn., is home to the Mark Twain House and Museum. Samuel Langhorne Clemens commissioned architect Edward Tuckerman Potter to design the 11,500-square-foot Victorian home. It was completed in 1874, and the family lived there until 1891. It has 25 rooms on three floors. The family contracted with Tiffany & Co. to decorate the walls and ceilings. It was ultra-modern for its day, was heated via ductwork, lighted with gas and had seven bathrooms with hot and cold running water and flush toilets. Clemens installed an early model of the telephone in 1878.

In 2003, the Mark Twain Museum Center opened with permanent and rotating exhibits, including a Ken Burns mini-documentary on Twain. The Murasaki Café offers Japanese cuisine from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

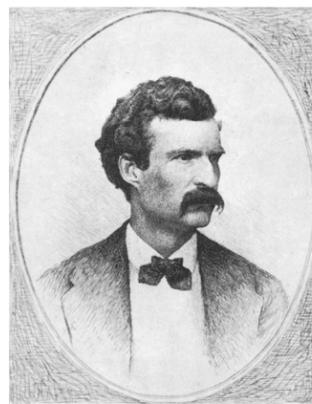
If enough members reserve tickets, the Twain House and Museum will close for FFRF-only guided tours Friday, Oct. 7 (11:30 a.m. to last guided tour at 4:30 p.m.). Admission to the house is by guided tour only (approximately 45 minutes) and is limited to 16 persons per tour. The self-guided tour of the museum usually takes viewers an hour to 90 minutes.

A group tour, including cost of the FFRF-hired shuttle, would be less than the usual fee of \$16 per adult, \$10 per child. The exact tour price will be announced after the Twain House is reserved. The shuttle bus would depart from the hotel about every 15 minutes on a first-come, first-served basis.

If interested, please check the box on the registration form to reserve tickets. FFRF will bill you separately for the tour once details are confirmed.

Return to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

Freedom From Religion Foundation's 34th Annual Convention October 7-9, 2011



Make checks payable to "FFRF"

Marriott Hartford Downtown Hartford, Connecticut

No. registering

- _____ FFRF Member registration(s) @ \$50 per person \$ _____
- _____ Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$55..... \$ _____
- _____ Non-member registration(s) @ \$95 \$ _____
(or join for \$40, save \$5!)
- _____ Student registration(s) @ \$25 (Ask about student group rate) \$ _____
- _____ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$25* per person \$ _____
 Vegetarian option ___ no. of vegetarian Vegan option ___ no. of vegan
- _____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$45* per person \$ _____
 Vegetarian option ___ no. of vegetarian Vegan option ___ no. of vegan
- Gluten-free dinners required on above selections

* Meal prices include 21% gratuity and 6% sales tax

Reserve _____ ticket(s) to tour Mark Twain home, afternoon of Fri., Oct. 7.
(FFRF will bill you later. Tour will take place if enough members respond.)

Name(s)

Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address

City/State/Zip

Please include phone/e-mail (in case we have a question about your registration)